

VHCB Proposed Changes to Section 3 of S.160 As Passed by the Senate

Jen Hollar, Policy Director, and Nancy Everhart, Agricultural Director

April 3, 2019

* * * Soil Conservation Practices * * *

Sec. 3. FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR IMPROVING IMPLEMENTATION OF SOIL HEALTH CONSERVATION PRACTICES

(a) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall convene a Soil Conservation ~~Practice~~ Working Group to recommend financial incentives designed to encourage farmers in Vermont to implement agricultural practices that exceed the requirements of 6 V.S.A. chapter 251 and that improve soil health productivity, enhance crop resilience, and reduce agricultural runoff to waters. The Working Group shall:

- (1) identify agricultural standards or practices that farmers can implement that improve soil health ~~productivity~~, enhance crop resilience, and reduce agricultural runoff to waters;
- (2) recommend existing financial incentives available to farmers that could be modified or amended to incentivize implementation of the agricultural standards identified under subdivision (1) of this subsection or incentivize the reclamation or preservation of wetlands;
- (3) propose new financial incentives, including a source of revenue, for implementation of the agricultural standards identified under subdivision (1) of this subsection if existing financial incentives are inadequate or if the goal of implementation of the agricultural standards would be better served by a new financial incentive; and
- (4) recommend legislative changes that may be required to implement any financial incentive recommended or proposed in the report.

(b) The Soil Conservation ~~Practice~~ Working Group shall consist of persons with knowledge or expertise in agricultural water quality, soil health, economic

development, or agricultural financing, and, at a minimum, the Working Group shall include:

- (1) the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets or designee;
- (2) a representative of the ~~Farm and Forest Viability Program~~ of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board;
- (3) the Secretary of Natural Resources or designee;
- (4) ~~a representative of the Dairy Water Collaborative, appointed by the Collaborative;~~
- (~~5~~) a representative of at least two Farmer's Watershed Alliances, appointed by the Alliances;
- (~~5~~6) a representative of the Natural Resources Conservation Council, appointed by the Council; and
- (~~6~~7) at least two members of the Agricultural Water Quality Partnership, appointed by the Partnership.

(c) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets or designee shall be the chair of the Working Group, and the representative of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board ~~Farm and Forest Viability Program~~ shall be the vice chair.

(d) On or before January 15, 2020, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall submit to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry the preliminary findings and recommendations of the Soil Conservation ~~Practice~~ Working Group regarding financial incentives designed to encourage farmers in Vermont to implement agricultural practices that improve soil health ~~productivity~~, enhance crop resilience, flood resilience and reduce agricultural runoff to waters.