



April 3, 2019

Working Lands Coalition Partners

Cabot Creamery Coop

**The Center for an
Agricultural Economy**

NOFA Vermont

**Preservation Trust of
Vermont**

Shelburne Farms

**Vermont Association of
Conservation Districts**

**Vermont Association
of Planning and
Development Agencies**

**Vermont Community
Loan Fund**

**Vermont Council on
Rural Development**

Vermont Farm Bureau

Vermont Land Trust

**Vermont Natural
Resources Council**

**The Vermont
Sustainable Jobs Fund
and Farm to Plate**

**Vermont Wood Works
Council**

**Vermont Woodlands
Association**

**The Woodstock
Foundation**

Dear Members of the House Committee on Agriculture & Forestry:

The Working Lands Coalition would like to express our opposition to Section 11 in S.160, An Act Relating to Agricultural Development, and to ask that this Section be struck from the final version of the bill.

The Working Lands Coalition understands that humane treatment of animals is an important issue that should be addressed throughout our agricultural sector.

However, we are opposed to Section 11 of the S.160 bill language as it modifies the powers and duties of the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board. Such reference to a specific program focus for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative would set bad precedent for future legislation to add special carve outs for narrow classes of farmers and processors.

Further, we believe the added language is unnecessary because the law already enables the board to make grants to farmers and processors who wish to pursue third party humane handling certification. We believe that the enabling legislation recognized that markets may change and that the expertise of the people who sit on the Working Lands Enterprise Board is crucial to identifying priority areas for grants. We believe that adding a narrow, specific focus like this would change the intent of the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative significantly. The law now recognizes that entrepreneurs in the agricultural and forest products sectors are best positioned to identify emerging markets and consumer desires, and to move into those markets.

We would also note that certification programs alone may not meet the market demand for humane treatment in the food system. Again, our entrepreneurs are best positioned to identify consumer demands and design systems and products that best meet those demands.

Also, it is our understanding that the Working Lands Enterprise Board will proactively convene a panel at the April 2019 Board meeting to better understand the opportunities on this topic to inform their future decisions. Subject matter experts will likely include Rural VT, NOFA-VT, Maple Wind Farm, Snug Valley, Green Mountain Meats, and Vermont Grass Farmer's Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our reactions to Section 11 of S.160 and our desire to see the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Program remain as is and to allow us to maintain the flexibility we need to effectively support emerging agriculture and forestry industry needs.

Paul Costello, *VCRD Executive Director*
For the Working Landscape Partnership and Coalition