

S.351: An Act Relating To Providing Financial Relief Assistance To The Agricultural Community Due To The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency

Section by Section Summary

Sec. 1. DAIRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- Establishes within the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM) a Dairy Farmer Assistance Program to provide financial assistance to milk producers and dairy processors that have suffered economic harm caused by COVID-19.
 - Milk producers are farms that produce milk, and include dairy cow, dairy goat, and dairy sheep farms.
 - Dairy processors are persons or businesses that process or produce products such as butter, cheese, cream, buttermilk, infant formula, ice cream, or yogurt.
 - Economic harm means a milk producer's or dairy processors expenses or lost revenue, or both, related to the 2020 COVID-19 public health emergency.
- In order to qualify for assistance under this section, a milk producer or dairy processor shall:
 - be currently producing milk or dairy products;
 - be in good standing—no final enforcement violation or grant violation pending; and
 - accurately demonstrate to AAFM economic harm that occurred or accrued on or after March 1, 2020 and before December 1, 2020 by providing evidence of losses or expenses caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- The Secretary shall award assistance as grants to reimburse qualified milk producers for demonstrated economic harm up to the following maximum amounts:
 - Small farms shall receive up to \$14,500.
 - Certified small farms shall receive up to \$29,000.
 - Medium farms shall receive up to \$55,000.
 - Large farms shall receive up to \$100,000.
 - Dairy processors processing less than 500 pounds of milk per day shall receive up to \$30,000.
 - Dairy processors processing 500 to 9,999 pounds of milk per day shall receive up to \$40,000.
 - Dairy processors processing 10,000 to 49,999 pounds of milk per day shall receive up to \$50,000.
 - Dairy processors processing 50,000 pounds or more of milk per day shall receive up to \$60,000.

SEC. 2. APPROPRIATION FOR DAIRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- \$22.8 would be appropriated from the Coronavirus Relief Fund for the program.
 - The assistance to dairy farmers will cost approximately \$19 million.
 - The assistance dairy processors will cost \$3.8 million.
 - Funds that are unspent on November 1 will revert to the AAFM to provide assistance under the other assistance program established in the bill.

SEC. 3. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCER OR PROCESSOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- Establishes an Agricultural Producer and Processor Assistance Program within AAFM to provide direct relief grant payments to eligible applicants that suffered economic harm due to COVID-19.
- Eligible applicants are:
 - Agricultural producers—non-dairy farmers who had a gross annual income of \$10,000 from the sale of agricultural products in one of two, or three of the five, calendar years preceding;
 - Commercial meat processors;
 - Commercial slaughterhouses; and
 - Farmers’ Markets.
- In order to qualify for assistance, an eligible applicant shall:
 - be currently operating a farm, a commercial processor, a slaughterhouse, or a farmers’ market;
 - be in good standing—no final enforcement violation or grant violation pending; and
 - accurately demonstrate to AAFM economic harm that occurred on or after March 1, 2020 and before December 1, 2020 by providing evidence of losses or expenses caused by COVID-19.
- An eligible applicant shall not receive an award under this section if in the applicant had a net business profit between March 1, 2020 and August 1, 2020.
- The Secretary shall award grant payments to reimburse eligible applicants for demonstrated economic harm up to the following maximum amounts based on annual gross sales:
 - Applicants with annual gross sales of \$10,000.00 to \$24,999.00 shall receive up to \$2,500.00.
 - Applicants with annual gross sales of \$25,000.00 to \$49,999.00 shall receive up to \$5,000.00.
 - Applicants with annual gross sales of \$50,000.00 to \$99,999.00 shall receive up to \$10,000.00
 - Applicants with annual gross sales of \$100,00.00 or more shall receive up to \$20,000.00.

SEC. 4. APPROPRIATIONS AGRICULTURAL PRODUCER OR PROCESSOR PROGRAM

- \$7,000,000.00 would be appropriated from the Coronavirus Relief Fund for the program.
 - Funds that are unspent on November 1 will revert to the AAFM to provide assistance under the other assistance program established in the bill.

Sec. 5. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH; AGRICULTURAL ASSISTANCE

- AAFM shall conduct outreach and education regarding the availability of financial assistance to farmers and agricultural processors under Secs. 1 and 3 of this act.
- AAFM shall report to the General Assembly monthly regarding the status of the program.

Sec. 6. FARM WORKER HEALTH AND SAFETY; CORONAVIRUS; AVAILABILITY

- AAFM shall post on its website VOSHA educational material on COVID-19 best practices or preventative measures for farm workers. The material shall be posted in English and Spanish.

Sec. 7. APPROPRIATIONS; VHCB; COVID-19 CONSULTING SERVICES

- Appropriates \$192,000.00 from the CRF to VHCB to provide business, financial, and mental health assistance to farm and food businesses that suffered losses or expenses due to COVID-19.
- Services will include assistance with accessing federal and State COVID-19 relief funds, access to additional markets, diversification of income streams, access to mental health services, and other assistance farm and food businesses may require to address business interruption from COVID-19.

Sec. 8. VHCB; AUTHORITY 10 V.S.A. § 321

- Amends VHCB's authority to provide that the Board shall have the general powers of a non-profit corporation.
- This will allow VHCB to more readily access federal and other funds that are available to non-profit corporations.

Sec. 9. REPEAL OF SUNSET OF REDI PROGRAM

- Repeals the sunset on the Rural Economic Development Program.

Sec. 10. EFFECTIVE DATE

- This act takes effect on passage.