

House Appropriations Testimony 2/20/19

I'm Paul Costello, Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, here representing the Vermont Working Lands Collaborative.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am here to request \$3million total for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative.

VCRD is charged by the Farm Bill as a neutral convener of community and policy dialogues in Vermont in service to their prosperity.

We convened the Working Landscape Council that built the idea of the Working Lands Enterprise Board and worked with House Agriculture to frame the act that built WLEB.

We deeply appreciate the leadership of the House in leading for the funding of WLEB each year.

WLEB unites agencies and non-profits to strategically invest in businesses that diversify and add value in the farm, food and forest products sector.

To us, these investments are the most surgical and direct drivers, for the money, of any state investments in rural economic development.

They help dairy farmers add value by producing yogurts, cheese, ice cream, and they help forest products businesses develop new products, new markets and creative innovations to advance the entire value chain in the wood products economy.

Vermont is not situated to compete successfully for the bottom of global commodity economies in dairy or logs; rural Vermont prosperity, rural entrepreneurs and young innovators, and the working landscape that we love, all depend on the seed funding for innovation and new businesses from WLEB.

So far, 203 projects have been funded, in all counties, \$6M distributed, \$10M leveraged, 508 Direct New Jobs, \$27M in new sales.

At this inflection point in the working lands economy, the Working Lands Coalition asks the State of Vermont to support the farm and forest economy, and the families that work it, with an annual investment of \$3M for the next 5 years.

We deeply appreciate the leadership of House Appropriations and all that you have done to support WLEB and all the people it serves.

All Vermonters benefit from the state's working landscape, and all should contribute toward its vital future.

Thank You.