



**Rural Economic
Development Working
Group (REDWnG)**

June 9, 2020

Rep. Chip Conquest
Rep. Laura Sibilis
Rep. Charlie Kimbell
Rep. Lucy Rogers
Rep. Jim Harrison
Rep. Carl Demrow
Rep. James Gregoire
Rep. Kelly Pajala
Rep. Terry Norris
Rep. Sara Coffey
Rep. John Gannon
Rep. Peter Conlon
Rep. Emilie Kornheiser
Rep. Tom Bock
Rep. Kelly Tully
Rep. Matt Birong
Rep. Kari Dolan
Rep. Randall Szott
Rep. Scott Campbell
Rep. Sandy Haas
Rep. Marybeth
Redmond
Rep. Mike Yantachka
Rep. John O'Brien

To: Representative Kitty Toll and members of House Appropriations
Representative Mike Marcotte and members of House Commerce

From: Members of the Rural Economic Development Working Group
(REDWnG).

RE: Request for \$5 million Appropriation for Working Lands Enterprise
Board for COVID19 Relief.

Dear Representatives Toll and Marcotte.

We members of the Rural Economic Development Working Group of the House of Representatives write today to express our support for a significant investment of Coronavirus Relief Funds in the Working Lands Enterprise Fund as an economic development strategy for COVID-19 recovery.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on Vermont's working lands businesses. Some farmers have lost markets that have been built up over years (e.g., restaurants and institutions), many forest products businesses have had to cease operations altogether, and dairy farmers have seen the collapse of milk prices and evaporation of markets. Many of these businesses have to pivot and diversify their products lines, transition to different markets, and focus on value-added development that is essential to continued viability and vitality. CRF funding can assist them and Vermont in building resilient supply chains with local goods.

We believe that **\$5,000,000** would be a strategic investment with significant impact across these sectors. Recently, the WLEB put out an RFP for \$180,000, and within 10 days had received "shovel ready" applications totaling \$2.4 million. Had more funding been available, it is likely even more businesses and larger projects, like transitioning dairy farms, would have applied, providing vital opportunities to shift business models towards long-term sustainability.

Now is the time to show support for this sector by making funds available and encouraging the land-based entrepreneurial innovation necessary to rebuild our state economy, and especially our rural economy.

Thank you for your consideration.