



**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.