

Tourism Day at Vermont Statehouse January 15, 2020

Testimony from Beth Kennett, Liberty Hill Farm, Rochester VT

Thank you for allowing me to represent the tourism industry today. My name is Beth Kennett. My husband, Bob Kennett, and I own Liberty Hill Farm in Rochester, VT, a dairy farm, milking 100 Holstein cows with our son, David, his wife, Asia, and their children. In addition, our family has had a farm vacation business since 1984 hosting guests on our farm for lodging and meals. We have the incredible honor of hosting over a 1000 guests per year for over 35 years from all across the country and around the world. They love visiting the barn, meeting our cows that make milk for Cabot Creamery Cooperative, seeing a calf born; feeding that newborn a bottle and trying their hand at milking a cow!

More importantly than our farm, I am here today to advocate for the tourism industry and explain why I am asking the legislature to set aside additional funds for tourism marketing. Our family embraced the agritourism concept over 35 years ago to diversify our income in order to keep our dairy farm solvent. The dairy economy has continued to struggle through the years and we still rely on the tourism component of our farm to make ends meet. In 1998, I had the distinct honor to participate in Senator Leahy's a trade mission to Ireland as the tourism delegate before the concepts of "farm to plate" and "buying local" had prominence. I saw how agritourism in Ireland was an economic engine for the country and I came home with a mindset that was transformed from "flipping pancakes" to seeing our farmstay as a contributor to the economic vitality of our community and agritourism as a key driver for Vermont. Celebrating our rich heritage, our working landscape, the diversity of VT farms- dairy, maple, apples, sheep inspired me to work with other farm families. Since that time Vermont has become a leader in the worldwide explosion of agritourism. In October 2020 Vermont will host the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Agritourism Summit with presenters and participants coming from every corner of the globe!

USDA compiles statistics on the economic impact of agritourism, nationally and at the state level. This would not have happened without specific marketing 20 years ago. Vermont received the very 1<sup>st</sup> Rural Business Enterprise Grant and 1<sup>st</sup> Rural Business Opportunity Grant from USDA in 2000. We used these funds to market Vermont agritourism as a concept. The funds allowed farms to participate with other tourism properties, attend travel shows, be represented by the VT Department of Tourism and the VT Chamber of Commerce. In two years, we increased the economic impact for our farm families by over 80%. This increase was unheard of for economic development statistics. In my experience specific targeted marketing has an incredible ripple effect. UVM has provided current statistics for you today.

Tourism impacts more than a particular property. Rochester is a small village in the heart of Vermont. My guests love to visit The Rochester Café for a maple milkshake; shop in Sandy's Books and Bakery, Big Town Art Gallery, Judy Jensen studio, and rent equipment at Green Mountain Bikes. They are thrilled to explore the RASTA trails for back country skiing and mountain biking; hike in the Green Mountain National Forest and fly fish in the White River. Guests order maple syrup from our neighbors to ship to home. Furthermore, my guests go home and buy Cabot cheese in their grocery stores in New Jersey and California and Florida.

My guests invest in Vermont! We need to invest in tourism marketing to continue to compete with not only New England but to compete with the rest of the world. In this day and age of global marketing, my cows no longer just compete with The Mouse in Florida and all his friends (aka Disney World); our cows compete with the turtle in Patagonia, the lion in Tanzania; the polar bears in the Arctic; they compete with whales! We appeal to you to invest in our communities and small businesses by investing in Vermont tourism. Breaking news: 2020 Top Travel Trend Worldwide is Farm Retreats!

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let me know any questions you may have. Respectfully,  
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