

Agency Weekly COVID SEOC update

AAFM Business Impact Survey

AAFM has officially discontinuing this survey due to reduced business participation and a desire for more nuanced impact data. We are collaborating with UVM Extension to launch a new ag producer and processor survey in July/August around the COVID impacts to Vermont's ag businesses. As we enter a new phase of COVID response and recovery, we are seeking additional information on the adaptations and pivots businesses have made, barriers and rationale behind their business decisions. This data should be available in early September and assist in the deployment of federal and state COVID relief funding.

Economic Impact to our Dairy Industry

Vermont lost 14 dairy farms in May 2020 (compared to 1 in May 2019).

VAAFM and partner organizations are hearing from the dairy community that there are multiple farms seeking additional production or selling their production quotas as both major cooperatives have limited production (DFA: 15% reduction and Agri-Mark: 4-6% reduction). While cow and replacement heifer prices remain low, the combination of a market for production quota and income from federal and state stimulus payments, may create a situation that is attractive for some to exit the business more quickly than otherwise anticipated.

State COVID Recovery Assistance

The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative received (120) applications in response to the WLEB COVID-19 Response Business Development Grant, for an ask of over \$2.1 million dollars.

- 18% of application were dairy related, 19% focused on forestry and wood manufacturing; 63% were value-added, livestock, produce, and specialty food related applications.
- (31) WLEB and subject matter experts will review the applications over the next 5 days, with a WLEB decision on granting scheduled the week of June 7th. Grants will be awarded within the range of \$5,000 to \$25,000, with \$180,000 FY20 state appropriation funding available.
- Funding is meant to support a business in responding to and repositioning post-Covid. This includes physical fit up of space to allow for greater physical distance, new packaging lines to meet altered wholesale/retail/consumer demand, e-commerce/website upgrades, increasing direct sales, collaborative sales, increased processing capacity to meet demand, or new product development.
- These projects are not intended for "making a complete 180" to a business. It should be a 15-30 degree pivot so businesses continue to rely on their area of expertise, just expanding what they are making, the markets they are serving, and doing so in a way that meets requirements.
- Applying organizations must have experienced, and be able to clearly demonstrate, negative business impacts due to COVID-19. Eligible proposals should have focused on activities that may improve business recovery. Match was not a requirement for this particular funding opportunity, though match of cash or in-kind was encouraged, and applications with match will be more competitive.

Working Lands Program Manager Lynn Ellen Schimoler and Agriculture Development Specialist Kyle Harris are engaged with other partners and independent retailers for expansion of national co-op's 'Rally for Change' program. The VT effort focuses on VT independent retailers raising funds for VT nonprofits, producer associations, or other businesses negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pick-Your-Own Restart Plan

The Agency of Agriculture published a [Pick-Your-Own Restart Plan](#) on 6/1/2020. Pick-your-own agricultural producers, including berry farms and orchards, must follow the Agency of Commerce & Community Development's Phased Restart Work Safe Guidance for retail operations as well as the guidelines identified in the Pick-Your-Own Restart Plan. Agricultural Development Director Abbey Willard and Produce Program Manager Kristina Sweet will present the plan during a [Pick Your Own Webinar](#) hosted by the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) on 6/4/2020.

Federal COVID Relief Funding Assistance

CFAP Farmers to Families Food Box Program

- The Abbey Group had their contract to supply food boxes extended through August 2020.
- Additional locally purchased fresh produce will be included in boxes (along with the VT dairy products) during this 2nd phase of the contract
 - They will be switching distribution models after June 12th when the national guard is pulled off the task
 - Not final yet, but mass distribution sites may no longer be part of the plan