

Paul Costello, Working Lands Coalition Testimony Senate Appropriations 4/16/19

Thank you Senator Kitchell and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

I am Paul Costello here on behalf of the Working Lands Coalition. We hope that the Vermont Legislature can support the Working Lands Enterprise fund at least at the level of \$2,096,000 in the House budget and consider expanding that to initiate a \$3M a year investment in farm and forest transition for the next 5 years.

Agriculture and Forest products businesses are the heart and soul of VT, especially of the rural economy, and produce the iconic landscape that attracts tourists and residents to Vermont.

The Working Lands Coalition formed to respond to the Dairy Crisis, and Long challenge to Forest Products Industry.

There is no top down formula to answer the pressures on farm and forest businesses today.

The best answer and action is in Seeding Diversification and Value Added Transitions-- supporting and stimulating the entrepreneurial energies of existing farm and forest businesses, and inspiring and attracting the next generation of farm and forest innovators.

To succeed Vermont has to break out of the bottom of the commodity economy into value added markets with ice cream, yogurt, cheeses, hemp, seeds and grains, vegetables, compost, wood pellets, meats—beef, goat poultry, pork--, ciders, beers, distillates, soups, soymilk, tempeh and tofu, furniture, bowls, the whole 9 yards of entrepreneurial creativity.

The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative builds a one-stop point for entrepreneurs to share the most creative ideas with AoA, ACCD, FP&R, VHCB, VSJF and Farm to Plate, VEDA, VT Community Loan Fund, VT Land Trust-- all the investment and technical assistance providers in a one stop shop reviewing cutting edge business !

To Date, 184 projects in every county, over 500 direct new jobs, leveraging a new job for every \$10K invested and \$59k in increased annual sales. These stats are current status...but we are building a ramp of business growth and success that has profound implications for the betterment of the rural economy.

Recognizing the fundamental challenges to the dairy and forest economy today, the House passed budget adds \$1.5M in one time funding to the \$596K in Governor Scott's budget proposal.

The Working Lands Coalition asks the Senate to support the House budget proposal for Working Lands. We believe, ultimately, that the State of Vermont should seed-fund the working lands transition as a key foundation of the progress of the rural economy with a 5 year commitment of \$3M annually. We deeply appreciate your consideration, your dedication to advancing the rural economy, and your leadership.

Addendum

WLEB Projects are building huge impacts, new markets, huge value adds:

Randolph: VT Chevron and Ayer Brook Farm—in partnership with VT Creamery, building a VT goat milk, cheese and meat industry in VT.

Bruce Hennessey, Maple Wind Farm—poultry, for them, the neighbors!

Richmond and Huntington

Waterbury Vermont Compost—growing jobs, renewing soils, and turning what was waste, to productive, and renewed use.

Champlain Orchards—revival of the apple value chain, Shoreham

Vermont Farm Table—more than 25 new jobs in Bristol—very popular simple designs—but making new markets for VT wood in cutting edge corporate offices and co-working spaces.

Kingdom Creamery—Family Farm Transition—ice creams, yogurts; Greensboro Bend

Vermont Wood Pellet Company; Clarendon

Calley Hastings, Fat Toad Farm goat caramel, Brookfield.