

From Vermont Agriculture & Food System Strategic Plan 2021-2030

Possible Ag Committee Bill Components

Purpose of the Bill:

To begin to implement strategic priorities and recommendations outlined in the [Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021-2030](#).

- Could reference the 3 legislative outcomes in the Farm to Plate Investment Program ([10 VSA §330](#))
- Could reference re-authorization of the Farm to Plate Investment Program in 2019 and the request in Act 83 (2019) for this plan to be developed.
- Could acknowledge that the Plan was developed by the VSJF in collaboration with AAFM and engaged over 1,500 Vermonters in its development; including 149 subject matter experts who wrote 54 product, market and issue briefs and over 120 producers and food system experts who participated in focus groups over an 18 month period.

Components of the Bill:

1. **Meat Processing Infrastructure:** With one-time funds of \$3million in the Governor's recommended budget (if sustained by the House and Senate), request that the WLEB prioritize some of those funds to be competitively awarded to strengthen meat slaughter and processing capacity in the state. Allow the WLEB and supporting Administration to decide how much \$ to allocate towards this priority strategy, but do send a strong signal that the Legislature would like significant funding support made available to this sector of meat slaughter and processing. Recommend that the WLEB consult the authors of the Plan's [Meat Processing Brief](#) and industry representatives to determine how much money may be needed to make an impact in the coming year. Also recommend that the REDI program through VHCB make a concerted effort to support meat slaughter and processing facilities in submitting strong grant applications to the WLEB and to federal funding sources to ensure their proposals are competitive.
 - [Priority Strategy #6:](#) *Improve productivity and processing capacity at Vermont meat slaughter and processing facilities through investment in plant upgrades, new facilities, technical assistance, and workforce development.*
2. **Producer Association Support:** With one-time funds of \$3million in the Governor's recommended budget (if sustained by the House and Senate), request that the WLEB prioritize some of those funds to be competitively awarded to strengthen producer associations in the state. Allow the WLEB and supporting Administration to decide how much \$ to allocate towards this priority strategy, but do send a strong signal that the Legislature would like funding support made available to support the capacity building and assistance provided by producer association groups.
 - [Priority Strategy #15:](#) *Increase funding and technical support for Vermont producer associations to expand and improve their membership services, and determine how services could be shared across associations. Potential services include marketing technical assistance, collaborative marketing initiatives, product-specific training, and connections to associations in other states.*

3. **Marketing Efforts:** As part of ACCD's \$114million FY22 budget request, there is a \$1million request to create a Tourism Marketing Promotion Fund using over target Meals & Rooms Tax revenue and a \$1million request to relaunch the Buy Local Vermont Consumer Stimulus Program. In both of these instances, encourage that ACCD work collaboratively with AAFM to ensure that a % of these marketing dollars are proactively dedicated to supporting the businesses in the farm and food sector.
 - **Priority Strategy #16:** *Fund coordinated marketing efforts, such as a statewide marketing campaign for local agricultural products, marketing support in emerging metropolitan markets, shared marketing broker positions, a shared communications and content creator position between the Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, and/or marketing materials for specific products or associations.*
4. **Payment for Ecosystem Services Support:** Support the continuation of the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) working group through February 1, 2023, as outlined as an AAFM housekeeping priority. Additionally focus on implementing at least \$250,000 of the recommendations outlined in the PES Final Report (January 15, 2020), with special consideration toward advancement of the research priorities and deployment of field trials (Total budget: \$500,000)
 - **Priority Strategy #27:** *Continue to support the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) Working Group, which is poised to be a central point of coordination and connection among the many needed PES research and design efforts. These efforts should focus on PES approaches that regrow or sustain Vermont's natural resource base so that it provides at least three ecosystem services: water quality, flood resilience, and climate stability.*
5. **Dairy Support:** Dairy continues to be a priority investment area for Vermont and the industry is supported by various bill components captured in this Plan. For instance, much of the technical assistance and business assistance needs are to support the dairy industry; payment for ecosystem services are targeting producers actively managing the open and agricultural landscape in the state – which is primarily managed for dairy production. Therefore, support for the dairy industry will be to support the various the Workings Lands Enterprise Fund, Farm & Forest Viability Program, and Payment for Ecosystem Services appropriations.
 - **Priority Strategy #5:** *Support stabilization and revitalization of the dairy industry through: (1) a comprehensive dairy products marketing program focused on quality that would assist producers with limited marketing budgets; (2) by expanding opportunities to differentiate the milk supply by supporting farms and processors to increase production capacity for higher-attribute milk; (3) increased capital investment and funding for dairy processing, storage, and co-packing (particularly for cheese, yogurt, butter, etc.).*
6. **Accessory On-Farm Business Support:** In the 2021 session, focus should be on supporting an Act 250 bill that would enable on-farm accessory businesses not to trigger Act 250 jurisdiction with disturbance of less than 1 acre in size; in 2022 session find funding for the position outlined in Priority Strategy #29 in the FY23 budget.
 - **Priority Strategy #29:** *Assist food and farm businesses with navigation of municipal and state permit requirements and regulations. This will create a more supportive environment for business growth and diversification, specifically as it relates to on-farm accessory businesses, farm employee housing, and development of off-farm processing, distribution, and storage infrastructure.*

7. **Agritourism Limited Liability**: Support passage of H.89 *An act relating to limiting liability for agritourism*
 - **Recommendation #4 in Agritourism Brief**: *Draft tightly-crafted legislation around the definition of agritourism in a way that supports a limited liability statute for farms offering agritourism experiences. This type of legislation would build on the accessory on-farm business statute (Act 143) and potentially impact zoning, insurance, liability, signage, and the types of activities permitted on farms.*

8. **Farm to School Support**: Support Senate Committee Bill in development – “Farm Fresh School Meals for All” to address local purchasing incentive program, universal school meals, and funding for the Vermont Farm to School program.
 - **Priority Strategy #20**: *Incentivize local purchasing by reimbursing K-12 school on a per-meal basis for purchasing local products above a certain threshold. For example, New York provides \$0.25 per lunch to schools incorporating 30% New York product in their meal program.*
 - **Priority Strategy #22**: *Increase funding for proven ways to alleviate food insecurity, and support these programs in incorporating more local food. Specific known solutions include providing **universal breakfast and lunch programs for every Vermont student** and increasing local procurement within each school cafeteria, increasing investment in and utilization of public food assistance programs—including efforts to connect these programs with local farmers—and supporting charitable food system efforts to purchase directly from local farms.*

9. **Food Security Planning**: There is Session Law language under development to request AAFM to add new language to its Emergency Management Plan Annex. Include this language in this Ag Committee bill.
 - **Priority Strategy #24**: *Develop a Vermont food security plan, centered around a thriving food system and inspired by community-based responses to food insecurity and disruptive events. Involve food insecure individuals as well as farmers in the planning, and investigate questions including, but not limited to, affordable housing, health care, transportation, siting of retail grocery stores, food distribution, and ensuring the continued production of food in Vermont. Work to adopt state and regional level policies, procedures, and plans to ensure that the Vermont food supply is sufficient to withstand global or national food supply chain disruptions caused by climate change and other disasters.*