

February 22, 2021

Dear Chairman Starr, Chairwoman Partridge and Members of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees,

We are writing to share with you a report, "COVID-19 Impacts on Vermont Farms and Food Businesses: Pivots, Needs and Opportunities for the Future". The report details the experiences of 223 farm and food businesses during COVID-19 gathered through a survey conducted in August-September 2020, led by University of Vermont researchers in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

The report clearly identifies the challenges faced by Vermont's farm and food businesses during COVID-19, with the majority facing economic and market impacts. Key findings include:

- Primary financial impacts included a loss of sales, which were experienced across all business types.
- 2/3 of respondents made significant or moderate changes to their business as a result of COVID-19.
- The majority of respondents that implemented new product, market or distribution changes intended to continue these changes for 1-2 years.
- 53% of businesses had changes they wanted to make but couldn't primarily because of financial resources, inadequate equipment/infrastructure or personal challenges.
- While the majority of respondents did not apply to COVID-19 programs or grants, those that did, were significantly more likely to agree they had the financial resources needed to make business changes.

However, the report also identifies opportunities to transition Vermont's farm and food businesses post-COVID-19, and clearly highlights the helpful strategies to make this possible. Key findings include:

- The greatest increase in markets was among website/e-commerce, and all respondents that made these shifts intended to keep them for the future.
- 60% of respondents that implemented changes saw opportunity for these changes in the future.
- The most helpful perceived strategies for COVID-19 recovery included additional financial assistance, market assistance for online/e-commerce shifts, and help applying for programs.
- Providing mental health resources in combination with technical assistance may enable greater access to these services that many people may not ask for (but could benefit from).

We would be happy to further review these results with your committees and provide additional insight or analysis if that is useful. We appreciate all of your hard work to help Vermont's farms and food businesses continue to be successful.

Sincerely,



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