



STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

February 2, 2022

Dean Leslie Parise
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Morrill Hall, Room 108
146 University Place
Burlington, VT 05405-0106

Dear Dean Parise:

I am writing on behalf of the Vermont Senate Committee on Agriculture regarding the staffing and services provided by UVM Extension. As a land-grant university, the University of Vermont College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has three important missions—agricultural teaching, research, and extension. Of these three missions, UVM Extension might be the most practically and historically important, as UVM Extension has provided decades of invaluable education and expertise to farmers and agricultural producers across Vermont.

However, the Vermont Senate Committee on Agriculture recently learned that UVM Extension was experiencing staff shortages and prolonged delays in staff replacement. In fact, the Committee learned that it would take 18 months in order to replace a recently retired UVM Extension employee. The Committee understands that it may take longer to replace an experienced, tenure-track professor, but we ask that you take efforts to fill the position quickly and more expeditiously than 18 months.

The Committee also was informed that several UVM Extension offices are not fully staffed and need additional employees. Failing to fully staff UVM Extension offices means that Vermont farmers and agricultural businesses delay receiving or lose out entirely on the important expertise and services UVM Extension provides. Adequate and timely staffing is critical to maintain UVM Extension's level of service to the farming community.

For over 100 years, UVM Extension has played a valued part in the farming community and culture of Vermont. The UVM Extension service serves an important role in most Vermont communities as UVM Extension offices are located throughout the State. UVM Extension staff are well

known in most towns and provide farmers with important support. In addition, UVM Extension assists in the transition of farm ownership, thereby helping retain the agricultural landscape of Vermont. Inadequate staffing threatens the sufficiency and quality of UVM Extension's services.

The services that UVM Extension provides may be even more important today as Vermont farmers implement precedent-setting water quality and climate change initiatives. Vermont farmers are leading the nation in managing and mitigating agricultural stormwater runoff to waters. UVM Extension staff members, such as Heather Darby, have played and will continue to play a key role in researching, educating, and assisting with these water quality measures.

Similarly, as Vermont initiates its Climate Action Plan, UVM Extension's services will be integral in the agricultural measures of the Plan. Farmers, and the State as a whole, will require the assistance of UVM Extension and its skilled staff in combatting climate change and adopting effective climate resilience measures. UVM Extension's work with the agricultural community regarding best practices, innovation, and efficiencies will be critical to the State's climate change success.

Governor Scott's proposed fiscal year 2023 budget includes a proposed \$10 million increase in the grant to the University of Vermont. The Committee supports that grant increase and the statutory requirement that 25 percent of it be appropriated to UVM Extension and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The Committee requests that you use these additional funds to restaff UVM Extension as soon as practicably possible.

The Vermont Senate Committee on Agriculture has served as a strong advocate for UVM Extension and its staff at the General Assembly. If you need additional information or assistance in staffing UVM Extension, please let us know. We will do what we can to ensure UVM Extension has the resources it needs to continue to provide Vermont farmers with indispensable assistance and services.

Please take what steps are necessary to fully staff UVM Extension as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Sen. Robert Starr
Chair,
Committee on Agriculture
Vermont Senate