

# Senate Committee on Agriculture House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry

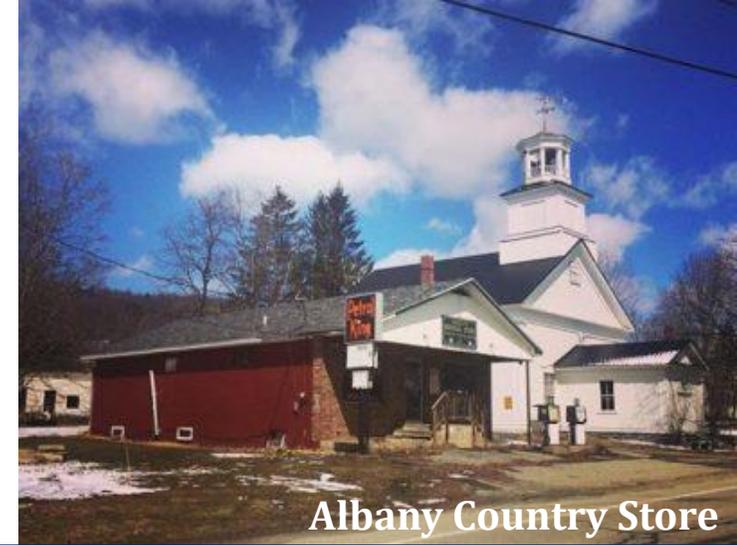
January 14, 2021





*"I don't think it's jobs against conservation. You can grow, but in a way that respects the culture and the landscape of Vermont."*

— John Ewing



Albany Country Store

## **VHCB Statute: 10 VSA Chapter 15, Section 301**

The dual goals of creating affordable housing for Vermonters, and conserving and protecting Vermont's agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands are **of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.**





## VHCB Results: FY 2019 and FY 2020

State Investment: \$31M

Leverage: \$162M

- 875 homes and apartments
- 45 farms; 5,765 acres conserved
- 25 natural areas; forests; parks and trails:  
7,908 acres conserved
- 2 historic preservation projects
- 317 farm and forest enterprises served  
with business planning and technical  
assistance.

### VHCB Program Impacts

- Farm and Forest next gen transfers
- Rural Economic Development
- Water Quality
- Homes for Workers
- Downtown/Village Revitalization
- Outdoor Recreation
- Housing the Homeless
- Historic Community Buildings

The farm in 1999,  
previous to  
conservation practices  
put into place by Guy  
Choiniere, who  
purchased the farm  
from his parents.



## Choiniere Family Farm, Highgate

The Choinieres implemented numerous conservation practices: installed buffers along the river, installed cattle lanes and fencing, and kept manure under cover using bedded pack barns. The farm now produces milk without feeding grain. The Choinieres have also purchased a neighboring conserved farm.

# Protecting Water Quality



Photo by Paul Richardson

“... the protection of lands for multiple conservation purposes, including **the protection of surface waters** and associated natural resources.

10 V.S.A.15 §303

# Clean Water Initiative

## Water Quality Farm Improvement and Retirement Projects



WQ Grant to Stonebroke Farm, Pawlet



Farm Retirement, Colchester

## Land Conservation and Water Quality

Boissoneault Farm, St. Albans - \$230,500 in capital bill funds leveraged \$356,500 in federal and private funding to conserve 264 acres on Lake Champlain including 140 acres of wetlands with multiple rare and uncommon natural communities.





## VHCB Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

- 18 years of in-depth advising
- 850 farm, food & forest products businesses served
- Businesses report skills increase in:
  - Financial analysis
  - Accessing resources/ specialists
  - Planning investments
  - Strategic planning





“We keep better records now and can see how much money each piece of equipment is making. Now we’re ready to assess the feasibility of new equipment set-ups and take our plan to the bank.”

**Karen LaBree, LaBree Logging, Danville**

“ I have a grand vision for what I think the business can do, but we never had it written down with all the steps needed to go through to get there. Having a business plan is going to make it much easier for us to make decisions...When we’re going through permitting processes or applying for capital, we’ll have a plan to show we know where we are and where we are going.”

**Tyler Riggs, LSF Forest Products, Fletcher**





# Helping Farmers Access Land with Conservation & Business Planning Support

**1 OUT OF 3**  
CLIENTS ENGAGED IN  
**TRANSFER OR  
SUCCESSION  
PLANNING**

**76%**  
OF  
**BEGINNING FARMERS**  
SUCCESSFULLY SECURED  
FARMLAND

**56%**  
OF RETIRING FARMERS  
**SUCCESSFULLY  
TRANSFERRED**  
LAND TO NEW OWNERS

“The Viability Program has been an asset and ally. We've greatly benefitted from our work with business advisors and consultants to help take our business to the next level.

This program assisted our farm in **scaling up over 8 times** from 2019 to 2020. We cannot recommend this program enough to other farmers.”

– **Valerie Woodhouse, Honey Field Farm**



**Honey Field Farm  
Norwich**

# VHCB Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program: Grant Programs

## Water Quality Grants

- Support lasting on-farm investments in water quality improvements
- FY20 Awards totaled more than \$950,000
- Awards leveraged more than \$3M



## Business Plan Implementation Grants

- Provide capital to bring business planning goals to fruition
- FY20 Awards totaled \$53,000
- Awards leveraged more than \$300k



“The Viability Program helped me take the time to think through my strategy. It opens doors because you have questions and can connect with someone who has expertise in the areas you’re unsure about.

It can get secluded out here, and there are more resources than I ever dreamed there would be. The Viability Program gets you connected to them. Making the connection with the Viability Program was priceless.”

– **Karie Atherton, Aires-Hill Farm**



## **Aires-Hill Farm Berkshire**

# Vermont Food Hub Collaborative (VFHC)

In FY20:

- 4 Food Hubs worked with more than 250 VT farm & food producers
- Together, sold a combined \$6.1M in products to 631 customers
- Expanded food access for Vermonters





# VHCB Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program: COVID Response & Recovery Coaching

From late March through December 2020, the Viability Program provided **524 businesses** with COVID Response & Recovery support.

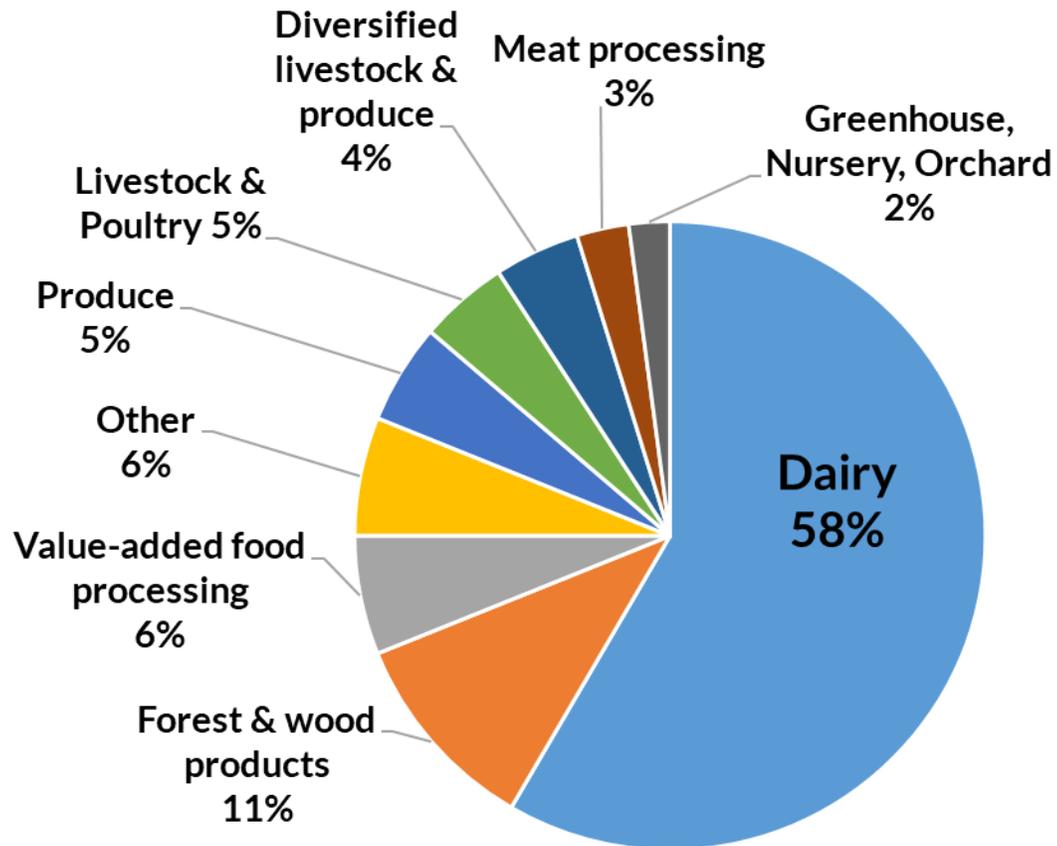
Services included:

- Financial & cash flow planning
- Navigating COVID relief funding programs
- Shifting markets
- Online & direct sales strategy
- Health, well-being & mediation resources

[www.vhcb.org/support-services](http://www.vhcb.org/support-services)



## Working Lands Businesses Served



### Impacts

- 82% assisted with navigating relief programs
- 400 businesses assisted with VAAFM VCAAP Grants
- 20% supported with pivoting sales to new markets

# Iroquois Acres Bridport



“The pandemic caused 30% of our income to disappear overnight.

Working with Rose allowed us to build a cash flow & budgeting tool that has helped us stabilize and improve our efficiency.

We’ve adapted this tool for different situations, which has been crucial to making informed business decisions. It’s been a game changer for us!”

– Stephanie Pope, Iroquois Acres

# von Trapp Farmstead Waitsfield



“When the pandemic hit, our markets disappeared.

We rapidly launched new branches of our business and needed help to make sure these efforts would support our business’ viability.

Rose has been an amazing help with analyzing our costs and setting sales targets to make sure the farm store can sustain itself and support our long-term goals.”

– Molly Semler



## **Currier Forest Products Danville**

“My team would not have been able to accomplish the feasibility studies for the low-impact equipment we were considering without these consultants and the unique access to them that the Viability Program provided.

The greatest benefit of the Viability Program has been allowing me to move business decisions forward without feeling like I am doing so blindly.”

**-Joel Currier, Currier Forest Products**



**Jeremy Russo owns Southwind Farm, an organic 6<sup>th</sup> generation dairy in Pawlet.**

Pandemic impacts threatened his farm's viability, and through COVID Response services, he accessed professional advising to meet production goals, access relief programs, and manage cash flow.

“We were in a unique position where our sales were increasing, but our business wasn't doing well because our labor wasn't efficient. COVID pushed the issue. The Implementation Grant allowed us to increase cold storage, significantly improving the flow in the building and our ability to provide more food to our community.”

– **Ashlyn Bristle, Rebop Farm, Brattleboro**





# Need & demand for Viability Program services

- Farmland access and affordability
- Succession planning & intergeneration transfer
- Water quality, soil health, and land stewardship
- COVID-19 recovery

# Farmland Succession: Intergenerational Transfers



Land conservation and business planning support to farm and forest businesses helps new farmers afford farmland and diversifies agriculture.