

1 H.386

2 Introduced by Representative Surprenant of Barnard

3 Referred to Committee on

4 Date:

5 Subject: Agriculture; succession planning; land access

6 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish an  
7 Agricultural Land Transfer Assistance Program at the Agency of Agriculture,  
8 Food and Markets to assist owners of agricultural land in connecting with or  
9 identifying prospective purchasers who intend to maintain the land for farming.

10 An act relating to establishing an Agricultural Land Transfer Assistance  
11 Program

12 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

13 Sec. 1. 6 V.S.A. chapter 208 is added to read:

14 CHAPTER 208. AGRICULTURAL LAND TRANSFER ASSISTANCE

15 PROGRAM

16 § 4651. DEFINITIONS

17 As used in this chapter:

18 (1) “Agency” means the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

19 (2) “Farming” has the same meaning as in 10 V.S.A. § 6001(22).

20 (3) “Secretary” means the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

1        § 4652. AGRICULTURAL LAND TRANSFER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

2            The Agricultural Land Transfer Assistance Program is established at the  
3        Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to:

4            (1) identify agricultural land in the State that may be available for  
5        transfer or succession;

6            (2) provide farm owners with assistance in succession planning or  
7        finding willing purchasers who will maintain the land for farming;

8            (3) assist new farmers in accessing capital or financing to purchase  
9        agricultural land;

10           (4) connect owners of agricultural land with purchasers willing to retain  
11        the land for farming; and

12           (5) implement the assistance, tools, and programs established under this  
13        chapter.

14        § 4653. FARM OWNERSHIP SUCCESSION PLANNING

15           (a) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets, after consultation with  
16        the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development, shall establish the  
17        Farm Ownership Succession Planning Program to provide farmers assistance  
18        with planning for succession of ownership of agricultural land.

19           (b)(1) As part of the Program, the Secretary shall develop a succession  
20        planning toolkit that can be used by farm owners who are planning on selling  
21        or closing their farm. The toolkit shall include the following:

1           (A) a summary of financial resources available to prospective  
2           farmers interested in buying farms and farmland for the purpose of farming;

3           (B) an itemized list of all farming-related education and support  
4           programs in place at public and private institutions of higher learning in the  
5           State;

6           (C) a list of State-supported economic development funding for  
7           farming and for sustaining farming;

8           (D) a list of organizations in the State and in adjoining states that  
9           auction and sell farming equipment and farming supplies;

10          (E) a list of insurance and financial services requirements impacting  
11          the sale and purchasing of farms and farmland;

12          (F) forms, legal templates, and other resources that may be helpful in  
13          exercising the transfer of agricultural land; and

14          (G) a directory of professionals, such as attorneys or accountants, that  
15          have experience in completing farm transfers.

16          (2) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall make the  
17          toolkit available on the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets' website to  
18          any person who requests the toolkit.

19          (c) As part of the Program, the Secretary shall conduct at least three  
20          educational workshops a year for the purpose of connecting owners of

1 agricultural land who are planning on selling farmland with prospective  
2 farmers interested in purchasing or leasing agricultural land.

3 (d) The Secretary shall train Agency staff or contract for services to aid  
4 farmers exiting farming and those beginning farmers navigate the land transfer  
5 process with the tools and resources available under the Program. These  
6 persons shall be known as land transfer navigators, and they shall be available  
7 to meet with prospective sellers and purchasers individually to facilitate lands  
8 transfers that maintain agricultural land for farming. Land transfer navigators  
9 shall also provide assistance to sellers and purchasers regarding the regulatory  
10 requirements related to land transfer and related to the ownership or operation  
11 of a farm, such as compliance with the Required Agricultural Practices.

12 § 4654. AGRICULTURAL LAND PORTAL

13 The Secretary shall develop an agricultural land portal as an online tool on  
14 the Agency's website that allows persons seeking to sell agricultural land to  
15 connect with persons seeking to purchase agricultural land. The tool shall  
16 include those public postings of agricultural land available for sale or lease,  
17 and instructions on how prospective purchasers can connect with sellers.

18 § 4655. LAND TRANSFER AND SUCCESSION BOARD

19 (a) Creation. There is created the Land Transfer and Succession Board,  
20 which for administrative purposes shall be attached to the Agency of  
21 Agriculture, Food and Markets.

1        (b) Organization of Board. The Board shall be composed of:

2                (1) the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets or designee;

3                (2) a representative of the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program  
4 at the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, appointed by the Speaker of  
5 the House;

6                (3) a representative of the Vermont Land Trust, appointed by the  
7 Committee on Committees;

8                (4) a representative of Land for Good, appointed by the Speaker of the  
9 House; and

10               (5) a representative of the Vermont Farm to Plate Initiative, appointed  
11 by the Committee on Committees.

12        (c) Member terms. The members of the Board shall be appointed for terms  
13 of three years or until the member's earlier resignation or removal. A vacancy  
14 shall be filled by the appointing authority for the remainder of the unexpired  
15 term. An appointed member shall serve not more than three consecutive three-  
16 year terms.

17        (d) Powers. The Board shall:

18               (1) assist the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets with  
19 implementation of the requirements of this chapter, including fundraising and  
20 development of expertise in land succession or acquisition; and

1           (2) recommend programs or tools to develop to assist in the transition of  
2           agricultural lands in Vermont from current farmers to those persons with  
3           aspirations to farm.

4           (e) Officers; committees. The Board may elect officers, establish one or  
5           more committees or subcommittees, and adopt procedural rules as it shall  
6           determine necessary and appropriate to perform its work.

7           (f) Quorum; meetings; voting. A majority of the sitting members shall  
8           constitute a quorum, and action taken by the Board may be authorized by a  
9           majority of the members present and voting at any regular or special meeting at  
10           which a quorum is present. The Board may permit any or all members to  
11           participate in a regular or special meeting by, or conduct the meeting through  
12           the use of, any means of communication, including an electronic,  
13           telecommunications, and video- or audio-conferencing conference telephone  
14           call, by which all members participating may simultaneously or sequentially  
15           communicate with each other during the meeting. A member participating in a  
16           meeting by this means is deemed to be present in person at the meeting.

17           (g) Compensation. Private sector members shall be entitled to per diem  
18           compensation authorized under 32 V.S.A. § 1010(b) for each day spent in the  
19           performance of their duties, and each member shall be reimbursed from the  
20           Fund for the member's actual and necessary expenses incurred in carrying out  
21           the member's duties.

1       Sec. 2. TAX INCENTIVES FOR LAND TRANSFER AND SUCCESSION;  
2               REPORT

3               The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets, after consultation with the  
4       Commissioner of Taxes, shall submit to the House Committees on Agriculture,  
5       Food Resiliency, and Forestry and on Ways and Means and the Senate  
6       Committees on Agriculture and on Finance recommended tax incentives or  
7       other financial incentives that would facilitate transfer or succession of  
8       agricultural lands from current farm owners to prospective farm owners.

9       Sec. 3. APPROPRIATION

10           In addition to other funds appropriated to the Agency of Agriculture, Food  
11       and Markets in fiscal year 2026, the sum of \$250,000.00 is appropriated to the  
12       Agency from the General Fund in fiscal year 2026 for implementation by the  
13       Agency of the Agricultural Land Transfer Assistance Program established in  
14       6 V.S.A. chapter 208.

15       Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

16           This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.