

Representative Mollie S. Burke
Presentation to House Agriculture Committee
H. 229
19 February, 2025

Purpose of the bill: to establish a Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special fund to provide financial assistance to farms and forestry operations that experienced qualifying losses due to weather conditions.

1. Reasons for the bill: 2023 and 2024 extreme flooding devastated farms and other working lands and businesses across the State.
2. Existing programs difficult to access, administratively burdensome, and not equitably distributed to small and medium-scale farmers and forestry operations.
3. Federal crop insurance program not designed to serve small scale or diversified farming operations. Many farmers not covered by crop insurance.
4. Purpose of State funding to ensure viability of farms and forestry operations for food security, climate resilience, rural economic vitality, and environmental health.
5. State should continuously invest in farms and forestry operations for resilience to current and future challenges.
6. State should establish permanent funding support program for viability, food security, climate resilience, rural economic benefits, and environmental health
Need for resilience against future challenges. Relief funds permanently available to farmers and forestry operations impacted by climate emergencies and extreme weather.

DEFINITIONS

List of “eligible weather conditions.” P.3

In addition the list includes any other severe weather event that impacts ag or forestry operations income. This is determined by the Review Board.

FARM AND FORESTRY OPERATIONS SECURITY SPECIAL FUND

Administered by Secretary of Agriculture. Managed in accordance with 32 VSA Chapter 7, Sub 5 (Special Funds. Definition, applications, creation and termination, organization and management.)

Special fund consists of:

1. Appropriations from General Assembly
2. Funds from public and private sources
3. Federal funds for State support of farmers suffering income loss due to weather conditions.

FARM AND FORESTRY OPERATIONS SECURITY SPECIAL FUND; GRANTS

- a. Secretary consults with Review Board and awards grants to operations that have incurred losses due to eligible weather conditions.
 1. Reimbursement up to 50% of uninsured or uncovered losses due to eligible weather conditions. Max award \$150,000 total per year per qualified applicant.
 2. Criteria for award amount to be based on annual net income of the operation in relation to median net income of all farms in Vermont
 3. Verification of eligible weather conditions may be through data from NOAA, other state or federal certified weather data sources, or other public or private weather or satellite data or models.
 4. List of reimbursable losses.

Secretary develops a streamlined application for award. P.6

Application made at any time, processed in the order received. Other details related to processing.

Evaluation of awards by review Board, within one week of complete applications.

Majority of Board makes recommendation.

Secretary issues award within two weeks.

FARM AND FORESTRY OPERATIONS SECURITY SPECIAL FUND REVIEW BOARD.

Attached to Agency of Ag, Secretary is Chair.

Names the other members of the Board. P. 8

Powers of Review Board P.9

Section 3. FUNDING INTENT: REPORT ON FUTURE APPROPRIATIONS

General Assembly recommends that Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special fund should receive an annual appropriation equal to 50% of the average documented farm losses from eligible weather conditions averaged over 3 years. January 15th Board shall submit to relevant committees in House and Senate a recommended appropriation to the Special Fund.

Effective date: July 1, 2025