

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry to which was
3 referred Senate Bill No. 60 entitled “An act relating to establishing the Farm
4 Security Special Fund to provide grants for farm losses due to weather
5 conditions” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and
6 recommends that the House propose to the Senate that the bill be amended by
7 striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the
8 following:

9 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

10 The General Assembly finds that:

11 (1) In 2023 and 2024, Vermont experienced extreme flooding and other
12 climate-fueled disasters that devastated farms and other working lands
13 businesses across the State.

14 (2) Many existing State and federal programs that are designed to
15 support farms and forestry operations are difficult to access, are
16 administratively burdensome, are not equitably distributed to small- and
17 medium-scale farmers and forestry operations, and currently do not meet the
18 needs of Vermont farmers and forestry operations in a holistic way.

19 (3) In particular, because federal crop insurance programs are not
20 designed to serve the needs of smaller scale or more diversified farming
21 operations, many Vermont farmers are not covered by crop insurance.

- 1 (4) The State should establish a permanent funding support program to:
2 (A) maintain the viability of farms and forestry operations in
3 Vermont in order to ensure food security, climate resilience, rural economic
4 vitality, and environmental health;
5 (B) continuously invest in farms and forestry operations in a way that
6 makes them more resilient to current and future challenges; and
7 (C) provide a source of relief funds permanently available to farmers
8 and forestry operations impacted by climate emergencies and extreme weather.

9 Sec. 2. 6 V.S.A. chapter 207 is amended to read:

10 CHAPTER 207. PROMOTION ~~AND~~, MARKETING, AND SUPPORT OF
11 VERMONT FARMS, FOODS, AND PRODUCTS

12 * * *

13 Subchapter 4. Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund

14 § 4631. DEFINITIONS

15 As used in this subchapter:

16 (1) “Eligible weather condition” means any of the following weather
17 conditions that are found to be closely correlated with agricultural or forest
18 operation income losses:

19 (A) high winds;

20 (B) excessive moisture, intense precipitation, or flooding;

21 (C) extreme heat;

1 (D) abnormal freeze conditions;
2 (E) a forest fire or wild fire event;
3 (F) hail;
4 (G) drought; or
5 (H) any other severe weather or growing conditions impacting
6 agricultural or forestry operations income, as determined by the Review Board.

7 (2) “Farm” means a parcel or parcels of land owned, leased, or managed
8 by a person and devoted primarily to farming and that is subject to regulation
9 under the Required Agricultural Practices.

10 (3) “Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund Review
11 Board” or “Review Board” means the Board established under section 4634 of
12 this title.

13 (4) “Farming” has the same meaning as in section 2.16 of the Required
14 Agricultural Practices.

15 (5) “Forestry operation” has the same meaning as in 10 V.S.A. § 2602.

16 § 4632. FARM AND FORESTRY OPERATIONS SECURITY SPECIAL
17 FUND

18 (a) There is established the Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special
19 Fund to be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets
20 and that shall be managed in accordance with 32 V.S.A. chapter 7, subchapter
21 5. The Fund shall consist of:

1 (1) funds transferred by the General Assembly;

2 (2) funds from public and private sources that the Secretary accepts for
3 the Fund; and

4 (3) funds from federal government aid for State support of farmers or
5 forestry operations suffering income loss due to weather conditions.

6 (b) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall ensure language
7 accessibility of the Fund through procurement and provision of interpretation
8 and translation services.

9 (c) All balances in the Fund at the end of any fiscal year shall be carried
10 forward and remain part of the Fund.

11 § 4633. FARM AND FORESTRY OPERATIONS SECURITY SPECIAL
12 FUND; PAYMENTS

13 (a) The Secretary, after consultation with the Review Board, shall award
14 payments from the Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund to
15 persons owning farms and forestry operations that have incurred financial
16 losses or expenses due to an eligible weather condition.

17 (1) Payments from the Fund shall be in an amount that reimburses a
18 farm or forestry operation for up to 50 percent of the unreimbursed, uninsured,
19 or otherwise uncovered losses due to eligible weather conditions, up to a
20 maximum annual award of five percent of the undesignated and unreserved
21 funds in the Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund at the

1 beginning of each fiscal year, provided that the award shall not exceed
2 \$150,000.00 per qualified applicant farm or forestry operation per year.

3 (2) The Secretary may verify the occurrence of an eligible weather
4 condition claimed under this section through a site visit or through use of
5 available data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,
6 from other federal or State certified weather data sources, or from other public
7 or private weather or satellite data or models.

8 (3) Losses reimbursable by a payment under this section include:

9 (A) wages or compensation;

10 (B) replacement of lost income from destroyed crops, impacted
11 livestock, or timber;

12 (C) debt payments or other ongoing expenses;

13 (D) costs of replanting;

14 (E) livestock feed replacement costs;

15 (F) infrastructure or equipment repair and replacement;

16 (G) repair of farm roads, roads necessary to access farms, repair of
17 washed out or otherwise damaged logging roads;

18 (H) inability to access harvested timber due to flooding or other
19 weather conditions; and

20 (I) other losses as determined by the Secretary after consultation with
21 the Review Board.

1 (b) The Secretary shall develop a streamlined application for awards under
2 this section that shall include:

3 (1) a brief description of the damage that occurred;

4 (2) attestation of an eligible weather condition or event;

5 (3) an estimate of losses; and

6 (4) a year-end report of farm or forestry operation income and expenses.

7 (c) An application for an award under this section may be made at any
8 time, and the Secretary may only close the application process upon award of
9 all appropriated funds for the relevant fiscal year.

10 (d) Applications for an award under this section shall be processed in the
11 order received for each quarter, but an application shall not be ready for
12 evaluation until the Secretary determines that the application is
13 administratively complete and includes all documentation required by the
14 Secretary.

15 (e) All administratively complete applications shall be evaluated by the
16 Review Board. Within 15 days following receipt of an administratively
17 complete application, the Review Board by majority vote shall recommend to
18 the Secretary whether to issue a payment to the applicant. If the Review Board
19 recommends an award under this section, the Secretary shall issue the award
20 within 15 days following the date of the Review Board's recommendation.

1 (f) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets may use up to
2 \$67,500.00 annually from the Fund for the purposes of administering payments
3 from the Fund.

4 § 4634. FARM AND FORESTRY OPERATIONS SECURITY SPECIAL
5 FUND REVIEW BOARD

6 (a) Creation. There is created the Farm and Forestry Operations Security
7 Special Fund Review Board, which for administrative purposes shall be
8 attached to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

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

10 (1) the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets or designee, who
11 shall serve as chair;

12 (2) the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation or designee;

13 (3) the State Chief Recovery Officer or designee;

14 (4) representatives of three agricultural organizations who can
15 demonstrate expertise in dealing with all sizes and types of farms in Vermont,
16 whether through granting funds, offering technical assistance, or advocacy, and
17 who have a proven track record of working with farmers, appointed by the
18 Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets;

19 (5) two farmers who have received relief funding, appointed by the
20 Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets; and

1 (6) two forestry operators, appointed by the Commissioner of Forests,
2 Parks and Recreation.

3 (c) Member terms; conflict.

4 (1) The members designated in subdivision (b)(3) of this section shall be
5 appointed to initial terms of two years. Thereafter, each appointed member
6 shall serve a term of three years or until the member's earlier resignation or
7 removal. The members designated in subdivision (b)(4) of this section shall be
8 appointed to initial terms of one year. The members designated in subdivision
9 (b)(5) of this section shall be appointed to initial terms of two years.

10 Thereafter, each appointed member shall serve a term of three years or until
11 the member's earlier resignation or removal. A vacancy shall be filled by the
12 appointing authority for the remainder of the unexpired term. An appointed
13 member shall not serve more than three consecutive three-year terms.

14 (2) If a Board member has a conflict of interest, as that term is defined
15 by 3 V.S.A. § 1201, regarding review of any application for a payment under
16 this section, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets may appoint an
17 alternate member to maintain a quorum of the Board to review an application
18 and recommend whether payment should be awarded.

19 (d) Powers.

1 (1) The Review Board shall review applications for assistance under this
2 section, assess the accuracy and validity of the applications, and recommend to
3 the Secretary applicants who should receive assistance under this section.

4 (2) The Board annually shall report to the House Committee on
5 Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry and the Senate Committee on
6 Agriculture the total documented Vermont farm and forestry operations
7 financial losses from eligible weather conditions averaged over the previous
8 three calendar years.

9 (3) In order to ensure that the Fund is meeting the needs of Vermont's
10 agricultural community and forestry operations community, the Review Board
11 annually shall review the application process, eligibility criteria, distribution,
12 and accessibility of the Fund. The Review Board annually shall recommend to
13 the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry and the
14 Senate Committee on Agriculture ways to improve the effectiveness of the
15 Fund.

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

19 (f) Quorum; meetings; voting. A majority of the sitting members shall
20 constitute a quorum, and action taken by the Board may be authorized by a
21 majority of the members present and voting at any regular or special meeting at

1 which a quorum is present. The Board may meet as an advisory body under 1
2 V.S.A. chapter 5, subchapter 2.

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

8 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

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

10 and that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: "An act
11 relating to establishing the Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special
12 Fund to provide payments for farm losses due to weather conditions"

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18 (Committee vote: _____)

19 _____
20 Representative _____
21 FOR THE COMMITTEE