

Feb. 24, 2026

Dear Chair Scheu,

I am writing on behalf of the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry (Committee on Agriculture) regarding the FY27 Budget.

The Committee on Agriculture in general supports the budget requests of the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets and the Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

The Committee on Agriculture would like to highlight its strong support for these existing base funding amounts that were included in the Governor's budget proposal:

- \$1,000,000 for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative
- \$500,000 from the General Fund to fund the Local Purchasing Incentive (included in the Agency of Education budget)
- \$500,875 for the Farm to School & Early Childhood Grant Program
- \$612,000 to the Natural Resources Conservation Council
- \$300,000 for Fairs & Field Days
- \$37.6 million (full statutory funding) for the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board per the governor's recommendation, with sufficient funding for conservation measures,

as well as the Governor's request for \$500,000 in renewed one-time funding for the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Community Grants program.

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The Committee understands that there is less funding available for one-time appropriations in FY27 than in the recent past, that federal funding remains unpredictable, and that a transfer of General Fund money to the Education Fund to offset expected property tax increases is under consideration. To the extent that state funding is ultimately unable to cover all of the requests below, and noting the impact that the loss of federal assistance could have on our most vulnerable citizens, we recommend again this year that the budget prioritize food security spending that also supports our agricultural economy.

Specifically, the Committee on Agriculture supports funding requests to the following programs and organizations that were not included in the Governor's proposal:

- \$500,000 NOFA-VT Crop Cash, Crop Cash Plus and Farm Share programs

- \$2,000,000 to the Vermont Foodbank for the Vermonters Feeding Vermonters program
- An additional \$1,000,000 for the Working Lands Initiative (beyond the Governor's recommendation for base funding), with \$500,000 each in base and one-time funding
- \$300,000 to the Natural Resources Conservation Council (beyond the Governor's recommendation for base funding)
- \$50,000 to seed the proposed Farm & Forestry Operations Security Special Fund that is envisioned in S. 60
- \$50,000 to Salvation Farms to help cover operating costs for its new food processing facility for surplus crops
- \$750,000 in new funding to the Supporting Loggers to Comply with Acceptable Management Practices (SLoCAMP) program to help logging contractors comply with acceptable management practices for water quality on timber harvest sites

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In addition, the Committee on Agriculture would like to express its support for the following proposals being recommended by other House Standing Committees:

- funding to support the Bridges to Health program, as recommended by the House Committee on Health Care
- funding to support Benefit Assistors (navigators), as recommended by the House Committee on Human Services
- base and one-time funding for Serve Learn Earn, as recommended by the House Commerce Committee
- funding for the Land Access Opportunity Board as recommended by the General & Housing Committee
- funding to the Foodbank for Responsive Readiness, and general food purchase and distribution, as recommended by the Committee on Human Services

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**The request for \$500,000 in renewed funding to NOFA-VT** includes funding to support a group of programs with a demonstrated record of success: the Crop Cash / Crop Cash Plus program, which enables SNAP recipients to shop at farmers markets for fresh local produce, meat and dairy products. The request also supports the Farm Share Program,

which provides discounts on CSA shares to low-income Vermonters. This program is successfully addressing two challenges that Vermont is facing —food insecurity and the loss of our farms. The increased drawdown in federal funding ensures that farmers are paid a fair price for their products and have access to stable markets, while also expanding access to locally grown food for Vermonters who, with these programs, can stretch their shopping dollars at our farmers markets. This is a modest request, with a profoundly positive impact on our communities and our local economy.

Investments in the **Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI)** administered by the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAF) – in partnership with the Agency of Commerce & Community Development and the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation -- go directly to businesses working the land to keep it productive, create jobs, employ Vermonters and contribute to the vibrancy of our rural communities. Year after year the level of requests for grant funding far exceeds the available amount. The requested \$1.5 million in base funding reflects the top strategic priority in the state food system's Strategic Plan. The Committee recommends that grantees provide a match in order to qualify for a Working Lands Grant.

**Vermonters Feeding Vermonters:** through this program, the Vermont Foodbank has been able to purchase locally grown food directly from Vermont farmers and distribute it through their organized and highly streamlined network sites and partner locations. Historically, this body has made measured investments in food security initiatives, but demand has increased post-covid and we now have the opportunity, with this program, to shrink the gap in the number of Vermonters who have access to Vermont grown food.

**NRCC:** Conservation districts play a critical role in state and federal natural resource management, delivering agricultural conservation work, streambank protection, clean water projects, restoration education, stormwater and invasive species management, and flood resilience efforts. For every \$1 we have invested in the NRCC base to support ongoing operations at the District level, they have leveraged another \$9 in competitive grant funding to implement projects on the ground.

In the past three years alone, Vermont farms have been afflicted by deep freezes, heavy rains and flooding, and prolonged drought. Based on reported losses incurred during that time period, the **Farm & Forestry Operations Security Special Fund** envisioned in S. 60 would require an infusion of more than \$15 million annually to meet one half of the uninsured and otherwise unfunded need. An appropriation of at least \$50,000 in FY27 would help ensure that the fund is officially established and able to expand in the future.

**SLoCAMP:** In FY25, the state appropriated \$1 million to the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation to establish a pilot expansion of the Water Quality Assistance program. The

program has so far been successful in supporting the implementation of water quality protection and climate adaptation practices. The funding has successfully helped to construct forest access roads, log landings, stream crossings, culverts, and managed sediment control. Due to the enthusiastic response to this program, the funding made available for the pilot is expected to run out later this calendar year.

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The members of the Committee on Agriculture present today voted unanimously to support these recommendations. Please contact me if you need additional information or have questions regarding any of these recommendations.

Rep. David Durfee

Chair House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry