

FY 2027 Budget

Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund

My name is David Keck, owner of Stella14 Wines in Cambridge, VT, I farm two vineyards in Cambridge/Jeffersonville, and have produced Vermont wine since 2020. I'm asking that the committee appropriate \$15.6M to the Farm and Forestry Operations Security Special Fund.

In April of 2023, we were on an upward trajectory with wine in the cellar and a tasting room recently opened in Jeffersonville when the May frost hit. We lost 90% of our production in the Boyden vineyard (which we lease). Grapes are an uninsurable crop in Vermont and federal insurance covers a tiny percentage of actual losses, so we were forced to take on other employment, close the tasting room, and continue maintaining a vineyard that was without grapes (and ended up flooding as well... not having any grapes on the vine, we didn't lose anything due to that, second, catastrophic event). We've diversified location since then, but the risk is still present.

Viticulture and the wine industry are growing rapidly with amazing press from all over (Food and Wine, the NYTimes, etc.). As this aspect of our agricultural landscape continues to get national and international press, we're seeing growing tourism dollars as a result, as well as more employment in this specialized field. Growing hybrid grape varieties in the northern climate is surprisingly resilient and proving commercially very viable. We do not currently make enough wine in the state to satisfy the national demand.

Please appropriate \$15.6M to this fund so that we can be pro-active, not reactive, and support the agricultural landscape of Vermont during this time of great climatic instability.