



WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE
www.vermontworkinglands.com

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Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Agency of Commerce & Community Development

01.13.2025

House Commerce Committee

VAAFMT Testimony on Working Lands Enterprise Initiative

History

In 2012, the Vermont Legislature and Governor Shumlin created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF), which was tasked with investing in Vermont's working lands enterprises to strengthen our economy, advance job creation, sustain our environment, and keep Vermont beautiful.

With a dwindling working landscape – Legislators had the foresight to understand why a program like the Working Lands Enterprise Fund needed to be created.

The WLEB

The Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) was tasked with administering the program and is made up of 20 members throughout the supply chains of agriculture and forestry, and staff from the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets; Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation; Agency of Commerce & Community Development; Vermont Housing & Conservation Board; Vermont Economic Development Authority, and Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund.

Cumulative Impact

It is deeply satisfying to see the impact of WLEI. In twelve years, WLEI has directly invested \$18.8 million in 555 farm, food, and forestry projects and leveraged an additional \$30.9 million in matching funds. Investments continue to make an impact in all 14 counties.

WLEI strategically invests directly in businesses and service provider organizations:

Business Grants: Strategic investments in working lands businesses that are poised for growth, can influence their value chain, create jobs, boost sales, increase production, and preserve or increase working lands acreage.

Trade Show Assistance Grants: Investments in agriculture and forestry businesses to market and promote products at out-of-state trade shows.



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Service Provider Grants: Investments in technical assistance service providers who work directly with working lands enterprises to support them as they grow, pivot, and adapt to an ever-changing marketplace.

Producer Association Grants: Investments in the organizational development of producer associations supporting their members with technical assistance, marketing, or research.

New Impacts

WLEI helps to create and protect jobs (with over 540 new jobs created to date), generate revenue (with more than \$92M generated in sales by grantee businesses), and keep the working landscape vibrant and vital (with over 24,985 acres benefitted).

And beginning this year, priority program impacts have been expanded:

Job creation has been and remains a key metric of program success. But, **given the current labor context, we now also ask about project impact on labor efficiencies, workforce development, and worker/owner wellbeing.**

Similarly, we have always prioritized project impact on **increased acreage in production**, and we now we will also prioritize **project impact on land management and climate adaptation.**

We have also added a **new impact category focused on equity, engagement and equality;** where applicants can describe how their project will reach or impact historically underserved and/or marginalized communities - such as people living below the poverty threshold and/or facing food insecurity or homelessness, immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, people with disabilities, veterans, and women.

Projected impact on increased product output and sales have been and remain, important priorities for the board.

Demand

In Fiscal Year 2024, demand for grants reached its highest point yet, with a staggering \$16,187,156 in requests for a pool of just over \$3 million.



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In the beginning people doubted if farmers and foresters would take the time to fill out a grant application but each year WLEI breaks its record for demand.

In FY25 WLEI was appropriated the \$1M base with no special appropriations.

Impact FY24

In FY24 we supported 65 unique projects, with 30% of funds supporting the agriculture sector with 70% invested in the forestry sector.

In FY24 business grants ranged from 6K to 250K – supporting businesses at different stages of development.

WLEI's flexible funding, the integration of sector experts into the grant review process, and the diverse expertise of the board allows the program to evolve and make investments that are catalytic for individual businesses and also investments that are actively building more viable food and forestry systems for VT businesses to thrive within.



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Supporting Information for Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Hearing

Cumulative Program Impact 2012–2024

- Funded 555 projects
- Benefitted 14 counties
- Distributed \$18.8M in Working Lands funds
- Leveraged \$30.9M in matching funds

Program Demand

Fiscal Year	Funds Available	Total Funding Requests
2024	\$2,150,000	\$16,187,156
2023	\$2,000,000	\$10,575,516
2022	\$5,594,000	\$10,109,747
2021	\$594,000	\$2,043,716
2020	\$1,594,000	\$5,015,147
2019	\$700,000	\$1,178,287
2018	\$694,000	\$1,902,316

Until 2023, the annual base appropriation for WLEF was \$594,000. In 2023, the annual base appropriation increased to \$1,000,000. Funds available beyond these base amounts came from special appropriations to WLEF.

Industry’s economic impact from scaled investments per every \$1M invested

Agricultural Economic Impact	\$1M invested	\$2M invested	\$5M invested	\$10M invested
# business awards provided	31	62	155	310
Average grant award	\$32,500	\$65,000	\$162,500	\$325,000
Leveraged matching funds	\$1,654,412	\$3,308,824	\$8,272,060	\$16,544,120



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New jobs created	40	80	200	400
Net new income reported by grantee	\$2,666,787	\$5,333,574	\$13,333,935	\$26,667,870
Avg % increase in product output	28%	28%	28%	28%
Working lands acres impacted	1,765	3,530	8,825	17,650
\$ generated in sales	\$4,044,118	\$8,088,236	\$20,220,590	\$40,441,180

For every **\$1,000,000 invested** in the Working Lands program, the following average impacts can be expected:

- a. 31 agricultural businesses receive a grant award
- b. Average grant award is \$32,500

Based on **every \$1,000,000 of business grant investments**, the following average impacts can be expected:

- a. \$1,654,412 leveraged in matching funds to support the projects
- b. 40 new jobs created
- c. \$2,666,787 generated in net new income by grant recipients
- d. 28% average increase in production output
- e. 1,765 acres of VT's working landscape impacted by the project efforts
- f. \$4,044,118 generated in sales (based on two years following the grant completion)

This data is based on Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI) program data from FY13-22. The collective WLEI investment between FY13-22 totaled \$13.6M, which includes awards to service provider organizations to work with and assist working lands businesses. Yet many of the estimate impacts outlined above don't include the business impacts reported by these service providers efforts. If that data were included, the impact of the WLEI investments would be even greater.



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Fiscal Year 2024 Investments

- Total funds awarded \$3,021,672
- Number of awards made 65
- Matching funds leveraged \$6,347,006
- Counties benefitted 14
- Total funds requested \$16,187,156
- Number of applicants 345

FY24 Service Provider Investments

1. Center for Women & Enterprise: \$20,000 for business planning for women-owned working lands businesses
2. Intervale Center: \$23,800 for upgrading Vermont Land Link website to accelerate farmland access
3. Northeast Forests Vermont Forest Business School: \$75,000 for training and business coaching program
4. Northern Forest Center: \$19,987 for supporting adaptation & growth for Vermont wood products businesses through 1:1 technical assistance, peer-peer learning, and marketing assistance
5. Northwest Regional Planning Commission: \$12,005 for sale & marketing technical assistance and updates to Northwest Vermont Grown website
6. Paul, Frank & Collins: \$55,800 for building executive business skills training program in labor and HR management
7. Rival Brands: \$33,250 for marketing assistance to build beliefs and brands of Vermont's business owners
8. Vermont Housing and Conservation Board: \$99,065 for building resilience in the agricultural sector through executive business & marketing skills
9. Vermont Housing and Conservation Board: \$99,986 for expanding access to business & technical assistance to foster a resilient forest economy
10. Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund: \$100,000 for developing a supply chain for beef-on-dairy terminal crossbred animals
11. Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund: \$56,430 for Vermont Forest Industry Network development

Producer Association Grants

1. Vermont Cheese Council: \$24,888 for expanding organizational and board development for member impact



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2. Vermont Vegetable & Berry Growers' Association: \$12,000 for maintaining and improving the VVBGA web site
3. Vermont Woodlands Association: \$20,000 for marketing activities to amplifying the role of private woodland owner stewardship

Business Grants

1. 802 Logging, Craftsbury: \$50,000 for feller buncher to increase efficiency and safety and to minimize environmental impact during harvesting
2. Agrigorial LLC, Jeffersonville: \$35,100 for The Farm Between value-added processing kitchen
3. Ananda Gardens, Montpelier: \$62,595 for building an accessible farmstand in the Montpelier area
4. Belter Family Partnership, South Burlington: \$250,000 for purchase and installation of GEA 9500 milking robots
5. Bear Island Maple, Bolton: \$16,650 for establishing maple sap collection
6. Calabash Gardens, Wells River: \$10,300 for certified kitchen build out for value-added production
7. Carman Brook Orchard, Swanton: \$15,000 for sustainable cider orchard transition with wild apple varieties
8. Chamberlin's Farm, Underhill: \$14,737 for farm store refrigeration
9. Champlain Valley Grain Center, Ferrisburgh: \$150,000 for still system for processing local grain day of harvest
10. David White Trucking, Lemington: \$67,370 for expanding logging equipment system
11. Ezili's Respite Farm & Sanctuary, Groton: \$15,000 for goat dairy handling & processing facilities
12. FinAllie Ferments, Townshend: \$50,000 for improving efficiency and storage capacity
13. Goodridge Lumber, Albany: \$225,789 for converting from diesel to electric-generated three-phase power
14. Grateful Morning Dairy, Shaftsbury: \$15,000 for establishing an on-farm creamery for value-added dairy
15. Hackett's Orchard, South Hero: \$25,000 for Honeycrisp storage expansion
16. Hillside Farm, Albany: \$11,253 to establish on-farm poultry parting
17. Howmars Farm, Franklin: \$8,600 for increasing organic potato production
18. Last Resort Farm, Bristol: \$74,565 for building new hay storage and renovating dairy barn hay loft for storing and curing high-value crops
19. LSF Forest Products, Fletcher: \$250,000 for sawmill expansion to increase production
20. Machia Brothers Dairy, Franklin: \$50,000 for farmworker housing replacement project
21. Maple Valley Farm, Bridgewater: \$15,000 for establishing a farmstand
22. Martin Family Farm, Williamstown: \$6,042 for hay wagon to improve hay sales capability
23. Milkweed Farm, Westminster West: \$15,000 for farm store display cooler



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24. Myers Produce, Craftsbury: \$45,000 for digital infrastructure to support regional sales and transportation of Vermont food
25. New Tradition Farm, Huntington: \$14,900 for diversifying with fruit and nut trees
26. Northeastern Vine Supply, West Pawlet: \$50,000 for vineyard expansion and value-added wine production
27. Severy Farm, Cornwall: \$185,829 for new livestock facilities for profitability
28. Slopeside Syrup, Williston: \$50,000 for purchase and installation of high-output packaging machine for single-serve bottles
29. SS Forestry Solutions, Williston: \$15,000 for Valmet forwarder rehab
30. Sunday Bell Farm, Danville: \$50,000 for new milking parlor and milking equipment
31. Sweetland Farm, Norwich: \$190,002 for fossil-free winter crop storage and production facility
32. The Goat Project, Bennington: \$50,000 for creamery construction
33. Top Rankin, Johnson: \$48,485 for organic raw milk dairy infrastructure development
34. Triple J Pastures, Irasburg: \$18,108 for mobile chicken house
35. Union Brook Farm, Northfield: \$9,168 for equipment to expand on-farm poultry processing
36. Vermont Bees, Swanton: \$50,000 for honey extraction equipment upgrade
37. Vermont Cider Lab, Essex: \$50,000 for processing equipment and furthering farm partnerships
38. Vermont Farmers Food Center, Rutland: \$50,000 for Heart of Vermont Agriculture Food Center

Trade Show Assistance Grants

1. Eden Ice Cider Company, Newport: \$4,980
2. Grand Isle Ice Cream Company, Williston: \$5,000
3. La Garagista, Bethel: \$5,000
4. Ledgenear Farm, West Glover: \$5,000
5. Maple Landmark Woodcraft, Middlebury: \$4,750
6. NOURISH (the Planet), St. Albans: \$5,000
7. Northeastern Vine Supply, West Pawlet: \$4,090
8. Sawyer Made, Woodbury: \$4,935
9. Tavernier Chocolates, Brattleboro: \$2,950
10. Treeline Terrains, Burlington: \$5,000
11. Trenchers Farmhouse, Lyndonville: \$4,975
12. UnTapped, Richmond: \$5,000
13. vonTrapp Farmstead, Waitsfield: \$3,288