

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

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

8 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

9 The General Assembly finds that:

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

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

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

20 (4) The State should establish a permanent funding support program to:

1 (A) maintain the viability of farms in Vermont in order to ensure
2 food security, climate resilience, rural economic vitality, and environmental
3 health;

4 (B) continuously invest in farms in a way that makes them more
5 resilient to current and future challenges; and

6 (C) provide a source of relief funds permanently available to farmers
7 impacted by climate emergencies and extreme weather.

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

9 CHAPTER 207. PROMOTION ~~AND~~, MARKETING, AND SUPPORT OF

10 VERMONT FARMS, FOODS, AND PRODUCTS

11 * * *

12 Subchapter 4. Farm Security Special Fund

13 § 4631. DEFINITIONS

14 As used in this subchapter:

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

18 (A) high winds;

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

20 (C) extreme heat;

21 (D) abnormal freeze conditions;

1 (E) widespread fire event;

2 (F) hail;

3 (G) drought; or

4 (H) any other severe weather or growing conditions impacting
5 agricultural income, as determined by the Review Board.

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

9 (3) “Farm Security Special Fund Review Board” or “Review Board”
10 means the Board established under section 4634 of this title.

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

13 § 4632. FARM SECURITY SPECIAL FUND

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

18 (1) funds appropriated by the General Assembly;

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

1 (3) funds from federal government aid for State support of farmers
2 suffering income loss due to weather conditions.

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

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

8 § 4633. FARM SECURITY SPECIAL FUND; GRANTS

9 (a) The Secretary, after consultation with the Review Board, shall award
10 grants from the Farm Security Special Fund to farms that have incurred
11 financial losses or expenses due to an eligible weather condition.

12 (1) Grants from the fund shall be in an amount that reimburses a farm
13 for up to 50 percent of uninsured or otherwise uncovered losses due to eligible
14 weather conditions, up to a maximum award of \$150,000.00 total per year per
15 qualified applicant farm.

16 (2) The Secretary shall establish criteria for the amount of an award
17 based on the annual net income of the farm in relation to the median net
18 income of all farms in Vermont.

19 (3) The Secretary may verify the occurrence of an eligible weather
20 condition claimed under this section through a site visit or through use of
21 available data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,

1 from other federal or State certified weather data sources, or from other public
2 or private weather or satellite data or models.

3 (4) Losses reimbursable by a grant under this section include:

4 (A) wages or compensation;

5 (B) replacement of lost income from destroyed crops or impacted
6 livestock;

7 (C) debt payments or other ongoing expenses;

8 (D) costs of replanting;

9 (E) livestock feed replacement costs;

10 (F) infrastructure or equipment repair and replacement;

11 (G) repair of farm roads and roads necessary to access farms; or

12 (H) other losses as determined by the Secretary after consultation
13 with the Review Board.

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

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

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

18 (3) an estimate of losses; and

19 (4) a year-end report of farm income and expenses from Schedule F of
20 U.S. Internal Revenue Form 1040.

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

4 (d) Applications for an award under this section shall be processed in the
5 order received, but an application shall not be ready for evaluation until the
6 Secretary determines that the application is administratively complete and
7 includes all documentation required by the Secretary.

8 (e) All administratively complete applications shall be evaluated by the
9 Review Board. Within 10 days following receipt of an administratively
10 complete application, the Review Board by majority vote shall recommend to
11 the Secretary whether to issue a grant to the applicant. If the Review Board
12 recommends an award under this section, the Secretary shall issue the award
13 within two weeks following the date of the Review Board's recommendation.

14 § 4634. FARM SECURITY SPECIAL FUND REVIEW BOARD

15 (a) Creation. There is created the Farm Security Special Fund Review
16 Board, which for administrative purposes shall be attached to the Agency of
17 Agriculture, Food and Markets.

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

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

21 (2) the State Chief Recovery Officer or designee;

1 (3) representatives of three organizations or entities with experience
2 granting relief funds or technical assistance to farmers, appointed by the
3 Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets; and

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

6 (c) Member terms. The members designated in subdivision (b)(3) of this
7 section shall be appointed to initial terms of two years. Thereafter, each
8 appointed member shall serve a term of three years or until the member's
9 earlier resignation or removal. The members designated in subdivision (b)(4)
10 of this section shall be appointed to initial terms of one year. Thereafter, each
11 appointed member shall serve a term of three years or until the member's
12 earlier resignation or removal. A vacancy shall be filled by the appointing
13 authority for the remainder of the unexpired term. An appointed member shall
14 not serve more than three consecutive three-year terms.

15 (d) Powers.

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

19 (2) In order to ensure that the Fund is meeting the needs of Vermont's
20 agricultural community, the Review Board annually shall review the
21 application process, eligibility criteria, distribution, and accessibility of the

1 Fund. The Review Board annually shall recommend to the House Committee
2 on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry and the Senate Committee on
3 Agriculture ways to improve the effectiveness of the Fund.

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

7 (f) Quorum; meetings; voting. A majority of the sitting members shall
8 constitute a quorum, and action taken by the Board may be authorized by a
9 majority of the members present and voting at any regular or special meeting at
10 which a quorum is present. The Board may meet as an advisory body under 1
11 V.S.A. chapter 5, subchapter 2.

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

17 Sec. 3. APPROPRIATION

18 In addition to other funds appropriated to the Agency of Agriculture, Food
19 and Markets in fiscal year 2026, the sum of \$7,500,000.00 is appropriated to
20 the Agency from the General Fund in fiscal year 2026 for the purpose of

1 implementing the Farm Security Special Fund established under 6 V.S.A.
2 chapter 207, subchapter 4.

3 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

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

5

6

7

8

9

10

11 (Committee vote: _____)

12

13

Senator _____

14

FOR THE COMMITTEE