

VERMONT FARM & FOREST VIABILITY PROGRAM

2024
ANNUAL
REPORT



Vermont
Housing &
Conservation
Board





OUR MISSION & OUR WORK

Our mission is to enhance the economic viability of Vermont farm, food and forest products enterprises.

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, a program of the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), advances Vermont's working lands economy. We work hand-in-hand with farm and forest businesses to develop business plans and improve financial viability, and we support farms and rural communities with accessing much-needed federal funding for economic development projects. These initiatives complement VHCB's investments in housing, conservation, and historic preservation that enhance quality of life across Vermont.

2024 IMPACT at a GLANCE

BUSINESS VITALITY

108 farm, food, and forest enterprises across 69 Vermont towns developed long-term plans while building skills in financial management and business planning. On average, clients increased their gross sales by \$45,000.



GRANT-MAKING FOR RESILIENCE

38 grants, totaling over \$940,000 and leveraging over \$5.2M, were awarded to farm, food, and forest businesses to increase production, adapt to climate change, and meet clean water goals.



RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We provided grant-writing and technical assistance services to 37 rural municipalities and working lands businesses, resulting in nearly \$3.9M accessed to advance their projects.



TRANSFERRING FARMS to the NEXT GENERATION

100% of farm transfer planning clients reported that their business will continue because of participating in the Farm & Forest Viability Program.



CLIMATE CHANGE & FLOOD RECOVERY

We supported working lands businesses to respond to and recover from flooding and other major climate events.

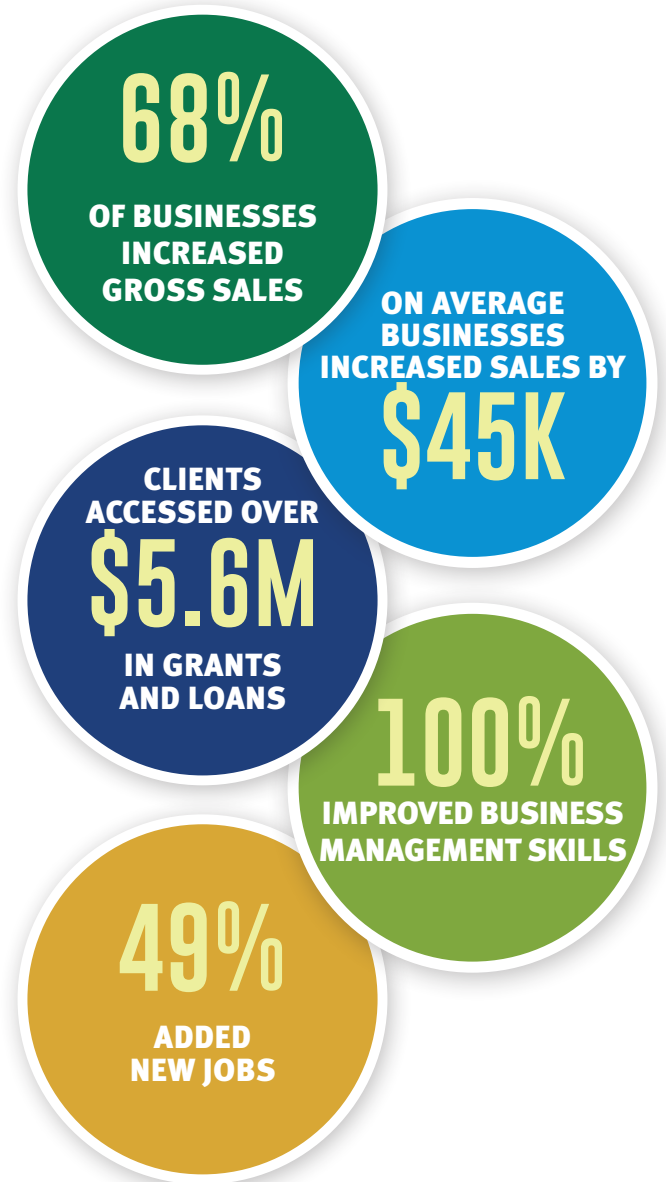


FARM & FOREST BUSINESS PLANNING

Over the last 21 years, the Farm & Forest Viability Program has worked to ensure that local farm and forest businesses have the resources to thrive in an ever-changing climate and economy.

Enrolled businesses benefit from extensive one-on-one coaching to meet long-term goals, address short-term challenges, gain business management and marketing skills, access affordable land and financing, and improve production. In response to the devastating flooding in July, Farm & Forest Viability advisors also swiftly aided affected businesses with urgent needs and long-term planning for recovery. Land access for young farmers and land transfer from retiring farmers is a critical part of our work. This year, 100% of farms engaged in transfer planning reported that their farm will continue because of their participation.

In Fiscal Year 2024, 108 farm, food, and forest enterprises were enrolled in the program to receive in-depth support (see p.12 for a map of participants). These businesses sustain an estimated 319 jobs (FTEs) and generate over \$42.5M in annual gross sales. Funding also supported our partners to engage with an additional 97 businesses through short-term coaching.



MAPLE GROVE FARM Derby

Maple Grove Farm has been in operation since 1988, when Scott and Lindy Birch purchased it. After retiring from farming and selling their herd, their son Andy and his wife, Sarah, returned to the farm and began producing milk for Cabot Creamery. With the support of their Farm Viability advisor, Mike Ghia at Land for Good, the family developed a plan for transfer and succession of the farm while prioritizing critical farm infrastructure updates.



BLACKBIRD ORGANICS Plainfield

Kagen Dewey and Elise Magnant concluded their search for land in 2023 with the purchase of a conserved property in Plainfield, just up the road from where they had been leasing farmland. With the help of Farm Viability business planner Nikki Lennart, from the Intervale Center, the pair has been able to shift their business plan from a land access focus to scaling up production on their diversified veggie operation.



TROUT LILY FORESTRY Westford

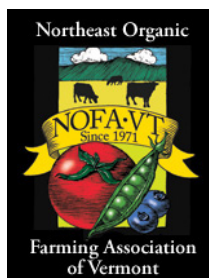
Will Dunkley operates Trout Lily Forestry Services, a company that provides a range of forestry services for landowners and businesses, while also working with his father to produce sap from their sugarbush. Will worked with Forest Viability advisor Chris Lindgren at UVM Extension to analyze a potential purchase of a new sugarbush by modeling expenses and income. After a successful purchase, Will expanded sap production and is working to grow Trout Lily Forestry.



Network of Partners

We use a network structure, collaborating with skilled advisors at partner organizations to deliver our shared business coaching program. Our partners include the Center for an Agricultural Economy, The Intervale Center, Land For Good, NOFA-VT, and UVM Extension.

In 2024, the Viability Program also supported business assistance provided by the Healthy Roots Collaborative, Food Connects, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, Northeast Forests, and the Vermont Land Trust.



IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS

Annually, the Farm & Forest Viability Program makes small grants up to \$8000 to businesses that have recently worked with us on a business or transfer plan. These Implementation Grants catalyze key projects to bring their business or farm transfer plans to fruition. We prioritize funding for projects defined during the planning process, with a focus on increasing local agricultural or forest production and climate resilience, and have awarded \$840,000 through 170 awards since the start of this program. In 2024, we made awards totaling \$136,119 to 16 businesses, including livestock and dairy farms, vegetable growers, forest products entrepreneurs, vineyards, and maple operations.

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HAUSKAA, East Burke

Ann Nygard's company, Hauskaa, uses local reclaimed wood to produce Nordic-inspired collectible holiday decorations which are sold nationally. She enrolled in the Viability Program and began working with Chris Lindgren of UVM Extension to support strategic decision-making and the growth of her brand. In 2024, Ann received an Implementation Grant to improve storage and packing systems after Hauskaa's main workspace was flooded in the July 2023 floods.



LA MONTAÑUELA, New Haven



Camila Carrillo has been growing grapes and producing biodynamic wine under her label La Montañuela since 2018. In 2024, she worked with her Farm Viability advisor, Sara Armstrong Donegan, to write a business plan to scale her business and move to a new farm. To help catalyze this business plan, La Montañuela applied for and received an \$8000 Implementation Grant to install new vines at her New Haven vineyard.

“With my advisor, we put my vision on paper and broke down the cost of what I needed to get to the scale I want. I am better prepared to apply for grants and loans, see where my money is going, and see how it is growing. With the help from the Implementation Grant I was able to add much needed infrastructure to help me get closer to my goal of expanding my vineyard and increasing my production.”

—Camila Carrillo

THE GOAT PROJECT, Bennington

Becca Knouss enrolled in the Viability Program after completing the Intervale Center’s Beginning Farmer Program with her advisor, Sara Armstrong-Donegan. With Sara’s help, Becca has been able to sharpen her bookkeeping skills, cash flow, marketing efforts, and plan for scaling her business to produce cheese. Additionally, she now has a comprehensive business plan to guide her process moving forward.

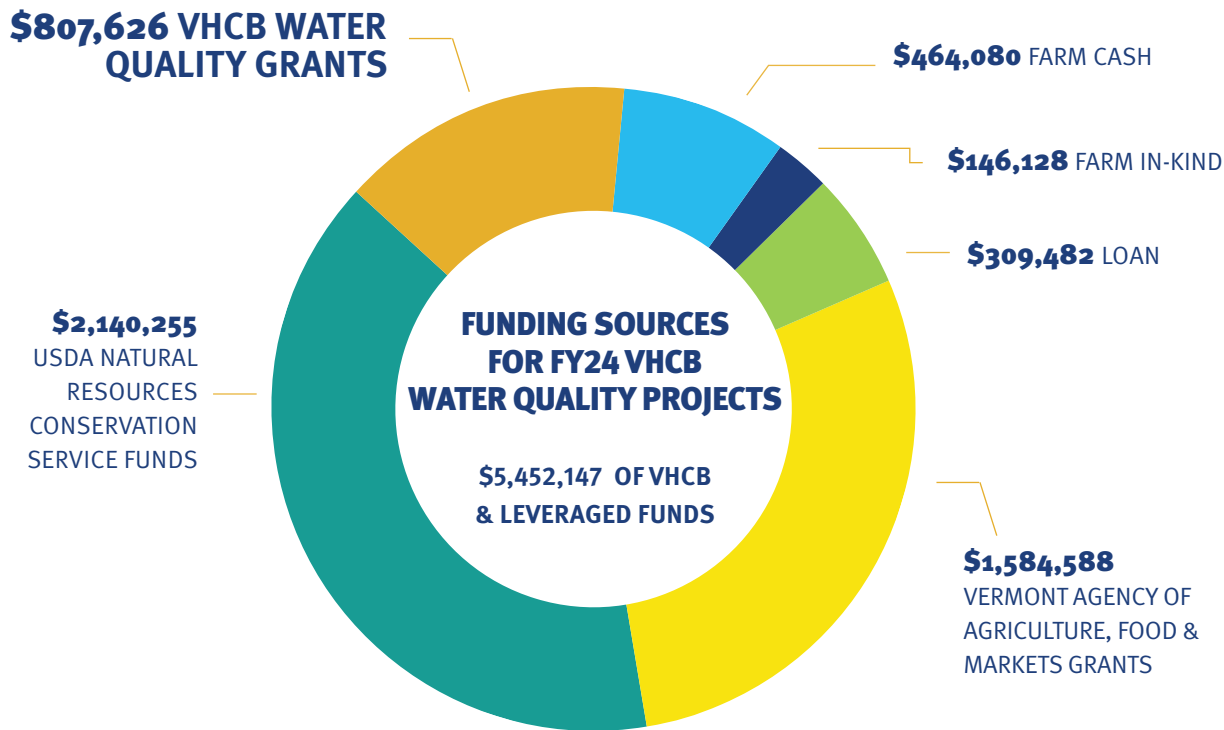
“Without a doubt, my farm business has more potential for success because of the support and assistance from Farm Viability.”

—Becca Knouss



WATER QUALITY GRANTS

In 2024, 20 farmers were awarded \$807,626 in VHCB Water Quality Grants to invest in on-farm capital improvements that enhance water quality. These 20 projects leveraged an additional \$4.6 million in state, federal, and private funds and will reduce on-farm nutrient runoff, improve soil health, enhance climate resilience, and support the long-term success of farm enterprises. These grants are part of the State’s clean water budget and complement investments from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM). Since 2017, the program has awarded more than \$4.9 million in Water Quality Grants.



Taconic End Farm, run by two generations, received a VHCB Water Quality Grant in 2023 to install a bedded pack system in their hoop barn, a project that was co-funded with a VT Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets Best Management Practices (VAAFM BMP) Grant. The project was a success, allowing the farm to improve their nutrient management cycle.

TACONIC END FARM
Leicester

COMMUNITY-SCALE RESILIENCE

FOREST TRANSFER PLANNING

Vermont’s forests are crucial for wildlife habitat, clean water, climate resilience, and outdoor recreation. However, we are seeing increasing rates of fragmentation in Vermont as privately owned forests are converted to developed parcels. With U.S. Forest Service and VHCB funds, we are working with partner organizations to provide forest land transfer planning as a measure to prevent forest fragmentation and promote long-term land stewardship. This programming has impacted over 60 individuals and 1,100 acres of land thus far and is a collaborative effort between Vermont Coverts, the Environmental Mediation Center, Redstart Natural Resource Management, Vermont Natural Resources Council, the Vermont Woodlands Association, and the RJ Turner Company.

GARDENS FOR COMMUNITY-BUILDING & FOOD SECURITY

In 2024, the Farm & Forest Viability Program, in partnership with the Land Access & Opportunity Board (LAOB) and VHCB’s housing program, established a new grant program for community-based gardens that promote equitable food access and food sovereignty. We are pleased to share the following awards, and we plan to continue this effort in 2025:

Vermont Garden Network: \$15,000 in grant funds will enable VGN to expand their current collective gardening opportunities to seven additional affordable housing developments.

Conscious Homestead: \$15,000 in grant funds will support the successful Flying Fish Fellowship, a collective community garden, CSA, and homesteading program for BIPOC Vermonters in Winooski.

Just Basics, Inc: \$15,000 in funds will provide start-up and expansion resources for the newly developed Paj Wadley-Bailey Community Garden in Montpelier, which focuses on supporting BIPOC gardeners.



VIABILITY CLIENTS & IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS

1. Ackerman Dairy
2. All Souls Tortilleria
3. Ascutney Harvest *
4. Basin Land Works §
5. Bear Island Forestry LLC §
6. Bird Song Farm
7. Bittersweet Valley Farm†
8. BJ Family Farms
9. Blackbird Organics *§
10. Blue House Mushroom Co. *
11. Blume Vermont
12. Blush Hill Beef
13. Boardman Hill Farm§
14. Branon Family Maple Orchards §
15. Bridgman Hill Dairy §
16. Butterworks Farm
17. CE Maple
18. Chamberlin's Garden & Farm Market
19. Choinere Family Farm
20. Clair-A-Den Farm/Kingdom Creamery *
21. Cloudwater Farm §
22. Cobble Creek Nursery
23. Dodd Farm
24. Don Sim Farm §
25. Dorset Peak Sheep & Cattle Co. §
26. Earthwise Farm and Forest
27. Endless Tracks
28. Flack Family Farm
29. Four Springs Farm
30. Full Branch Tree Care
31. Gagnon Lumber Inc
32. Gevry Firewood
33. Goodridge Lumber Inc
34. Grateful Morning Farm *§
35. Green Valley Organic
36. Hall & Breen Farm, LLC
37. Happy Bird Poultry *
38. Harrison's Homegrown *§
39. Hauskaa*
40. Hillside Farm
41. Houde Family Farm
42. Hunger Moon Farm
43. Ice House Farm
44. JASA Family Farm §
45. Jones Farm
46. La Garagista
47. La Montañuela *
48. Langlais Family Tree Farm
49. Lavender Essentials of Vermont
50. Lazy Dog Farm *§
51. Leaping Bear Farm §
52. LePages Rising Sun Farm
53. Levy Lamb §
54. Long Cloud Farm
55. Long Wind Farm
56. Luna Bleu Farm
57. Mama's Farm
58. Maple Cedar View
59. Maple Lane Farm §
60. Maplemont Farm
61. Martin Family Farm
62. Mayo's Maple Farm*
63. McDonald Farm
64. Michaud Dairy §
65. Milkweed Farm*
66. Morse Brook Farm
67. Mureta's Meat Processing
68. NEK Grains
69. New Tradition Farm *§
70. Northwind Farm §
71. Osprey Hill Farm §
72. Oughta-Be Farm
73. Paprika Catering Co.
74. Pumpkin Village Foods
75. Sandiwood Farm
76. Scholten Family Farm §
77. Silloway Maple
78. Snug Valley Farm
79. Solinsky Farm
80. Stargazer Farm/Liberty Orchard
81. Stella 14 Wines
82. Stitchdown Farm *§
83. Stony Pond Farm†
84. Sugar House Farm
85. Sunday Bell Farm *
86. Sweet Rowen Farmstead §
87. Sykes Hollow Land & Livestock §
88. Tell-A-Tale Farm
89. The Goat Project
90. The Russell Farm
91. The Sole Connection Farm *
92. Tyler Murray Farm
93. Understory Farm
94. VT Vineyards
95. Verse River Logging
96. Von Trapp Farm
97. VT Heritage Grazers
98. Waterman Orchards *
99. Wayward Goose Farm
100. Westminster Wagyu *
101. Wild Earth Farm *§
102. Wild Woods Maple
103. Wildstone Farm
104. Wonder Why Farm
105. Woodard Farm §
106. Woodlawn Farm
107. Woods Market Garden
108. Yeoman Joinery

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

\$1,086,681 → **\$22,751,701**
REDI FUNDS SINCE 2017 GRANTS TO COMMUNITIES

The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) helps Vermont’s small communities access complex funding sources to advance the working lands sector, support community revitalization, and expand outdoor recreation opportunities. REDI provides grant writing assistance to projects in small, rural communities that are limited by staff capacity or experience to ensure that they can access the funding needed to accomplish transformational community development projects. Since REDI’s inception in 2017, we have secured over \$22.7 million for small communities, with an average grant award of \$270,000.

The need for this programming has grown as rural communities across the state grapple with pandemic recovery and catastrophic flooding. With increased funding from the Legislature, USDA Rural Development, and the VT Agency of Administration Municipal Technical Assistance Program, REDI has more than doubled the number of communities reached annually since the program’s inception. In 2024 REDI assisted 37 communities and businesses; so far, 16 have secured nearly \$3.9M in grants with over \$1 million in additional awards pending.

HISTORIC LIBRARY REVITALIZATION Canaan

In Essex County, one of the most geographically isolated parts of the state, the historic Alice M. Ward Memorial library is a beacon of resources and connectivity. In need of renovations to maintain critical functions and expand offerings to foster community resilience, the library worked with REDI consultants to secure a \$900,000 VT Department of Libraries/ U.S. Treasury ARPA grant for critical accessibility and modernization renovations to support lasting provision of essential services in Essex County.



On their family farm in West Newbury, the Wyatt family has spent the last 16 years making artisanal yogurt with the milk, maple, and much of the fruit coming directly from their farm. The Wyatts worked with a REDI

consultant to secure a \$101,000 Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center grant to double their yogurt production, improve labor efficiency, and meet growing customer demand.

“Without REDI’s help navigating the application and help strengthening our proposal, we would not have been able to complete the process successfully and be awarded the funding that we received.”

— Diane Wyatt, Sweet Cow Yogurt

SWEET COW YOGURT, West Newbury

FUNDED PROJECTS IN 2024

Historic Community Hub, Rupert: \$120,000 in USDA Community Facilities funds secured to rehabilitate historic Sheldon General Store.

Accessible Services, Salisbury: \$978,807 from a joint VT Department of Libraries/ U.S. Treasury ARPA grant will restore the historic town hall and library, ensuring building accessibility.

Dairy Modernization, East Hardwick: \$77,083 in federal Dairy Business Innovation Center funds to increase herd health & efficiency at Kingdom Creamery.

Revitalized Community Space, Bellows Falls: \$69,250 USDA Rural Business Development Grant will revitalize the historic Miss Bellow Falls Diner.

Community Art & Recreation, Arlington: \$400,000 Community Recovery & Revitalization Program grant to upgrade recreation space and restore a historic performing arts venue.

Small Farm Viability, Newport: \$50,000 from the Dairy Business Innovation Center will upgrade JASA Family Farm’s milking system to increase farm profitability.

Community Gathering Space, McIndoes Falls: \$60,000 in grant and philanthropic funds to restore the 1853 McIndoes Falls Academy as a community, education, and recreation hub.

Flood Recovery, Hartland: \$44,166 from the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative to support flood recovery and resilience for the Hartland Winter Trails System.

Downtown Trail Connectivity, Johnson: \$27,700 in VOREC funds will begin the process of connecting the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail to the Johnson Town Center.

Accessible Recreation, Cornwall: \$248,231 in VOREC funds for improved public recreation infrastructure adjacent to the elementary school.

Community Connection, South Hero: \$500,000 Northern Border Regional Commission grant to restore the 1816 Old White Meeting House as a community center.

Inclusive Trails, Duxbury: \$45,000 Recreation Trails Program Grant will help establish inclusive new trail infrastructure at Pratt Refuge.

Growing Dairy Operation, Irasburg: \$50,000 Dairy Business Innovation Center grant will allow Thibeault Farm to expand milk production.



With a \$226,885 VT Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) grant, Unlikely Riders will increase recreation opportunities for BIPOC skiers and riders across Vermont through a gear closet program, expanding organizational capacity, and advancing their Baselodge project – a BIPOC-stewarded outdoor community center where generations of BIPOC outdoorspeople can come together to learn and recreate.

“It was so helpful to work with an experienced grant writer on the most complex grant we’ve applied for to date. Our consultant understood the process every step of the way and guided us through in partnership.”

— Abby Crisostomo, Unlikely Riders

UNLIKELY RIDERS, Statewide

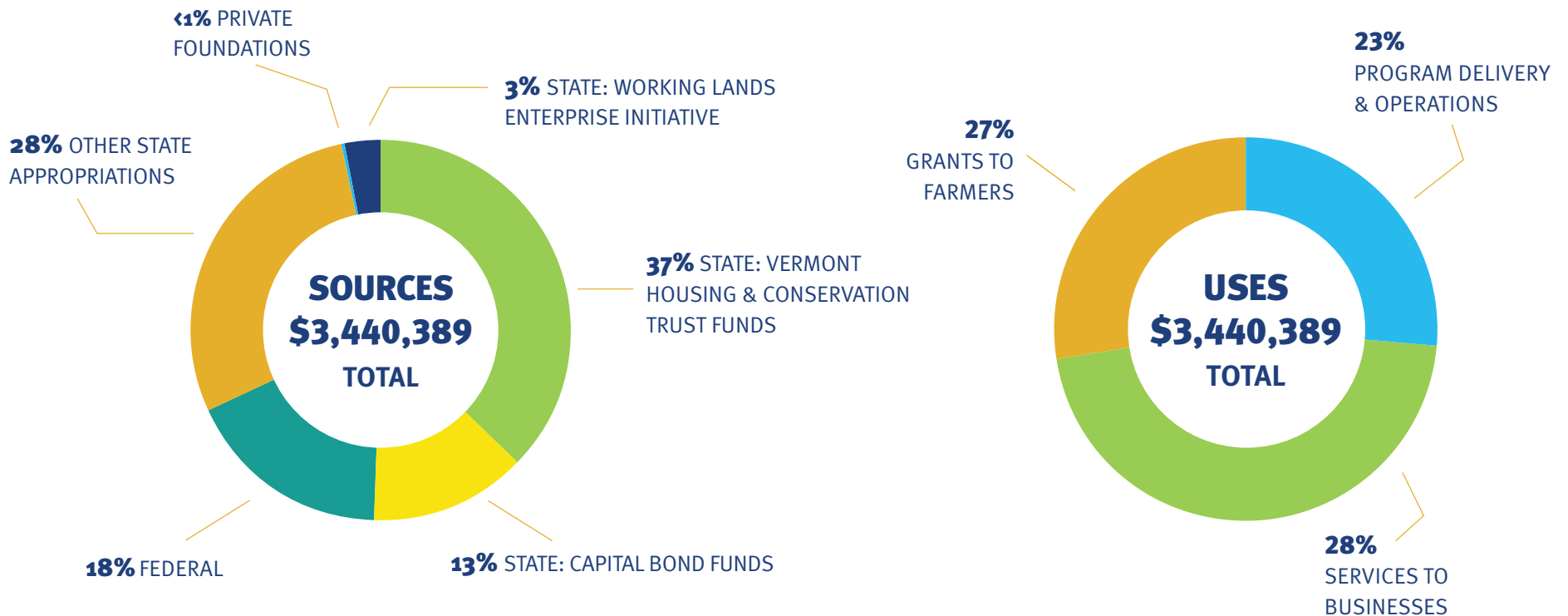
FY2024 FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

In FY24 the Farm & Forest Viability Program expended \$3.44 million, 18% coming from federal and private funding sources.

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program is funded through the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. In FY24, the Farm & Forest Viability Program also utilized funding from the US Economic Development Administration, USDA

Rural Development, Northern Border Regional Commission, Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board, VT Community Foundation, VT Agency of Administration, US Small Business Administration, and the United States Forest Service.

This report is produced by the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets pursuant to V.S.A. § 4710(f) & 10 V.S.A. § 325m(g).



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VERMONT FARM & FOREST VIABILITY

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ACKERMANN DAIRY, HARDWICK



NEW TRADITION FARM, HUNTINGTON



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