

**From:** Gil Livingston [Gil@vlt.org]

**Sent:** Friday, October 18, 2013 3:39 PM

**To:** London, Sarah

**CC:** Seelig, G; Ross, Chuck; Siobhan Smith

**Subject:** Willey W&C Governor's Acceptance Memo (FY14) revised Oct 18 2013.doc

**Attachments:** Willey W&C Governor's Acceptance Memo (FY14) revised Oct 18 2013.doc;  
ATT00001.txt

Sarah:

Attached is a revised memo - see the last, highlighted paragraph which is the only change. Because we are raising \$1.4 MM privately, no state dollars will be spent on the farmland easement purchase. There is no bargain-sale because of this substantial private fund raising and because we exempt first time farm buyers from the expectation of a bargain sale.

Do let me know if you need a further explanation. If not, we'll send this revised memo to Sylvia for Chuck's signature and delivery to you.

**TO:** Peter Shumlin, Governor

**FROM:** Charles R. Ross, Jr., Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

**DATE:** September 3, 2013

**RE:** Acquisition of Development Rights – Sawyer Bay Farm, South Hero

Your approval is requested for the acquisition of development rights, conservation restrictions, option to purchase, and right of enforcement of the United States on 178.58 acres of farmland in South Hero, which will be purchased and simultaneously conserved by Eric and Hannah Noel and their partners Bob Fireovid and Joan Falcao.

The South Hero Selectboard, Planning Commission, and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission indicate their support of the conservation of this parcel, as evidenced by the attached letters.

## **I. Description of Property**

The Sawyer Bay Farm is an incredible agricultural resource. It is 90% prime and statewide soils with over 150 acres of tillable land with tile drainage. The infrastructure is in very good condition with several places for storage, a 70 by 150 foot solar barn, and a large former dairy barn that has been renovated. The farm has over 1,100 feet of frontage on Lake Champlain. This frontage is along a very narrow strip of land between West Shore Road and the lake and is not a very safe place for cars to pull over. For this reason, public access is not included in the project. West Shore Road is however used very heavily by summer guests to the lake community, and maintaining the open land is an important part of the aesthetics and support for the project.

VLT and SHLT selected Eric and Hannah Noel and their partners Bob Fireovid and Joan Falcao as the farm buyers for this project. Eric and Hannah are leaders in Vermont agriculture; Hannah is on the VHCB Ag Viability committee, and Eric is president of the Vermont Grass Farmers Association and on the Board of Vermont Beef Producers. Eric is a consultant working to educate farmers on practices that improve soils and water quality. Eric, Hannah, Bob, and Joan will own the farm together. They have started contact with three other Champlain Island farm producers to aggregate products to offer through a larger multi-farm CSA.

## **II. Need**

Conservation of the Sawyer Bay Farm, one of the highest conservation priorities of the South Hero Land Trust (SHLT), will be the culmination of many years of hard work by SHLT and VLT to secure this prime parcel of farmland in the South Hero community. The parcel had been approved for subdivision into six parcels; the former owner had obtained all local and state permits, including an Act 250 permit, required to subdivide and develop the farm into six lots.

Instead, Eric and Hannah will relocate the Maplewood Organics operation from rented land in Highgate to South Hero. Much of Maplewood Organics existing market is in close proximity to Burlington, including the Intervale Food Hub. The farm will be used to support their grass-based beef herd, vegetable production, an aggregated multi-farm CSA, education programs, and cooler and freezer storage. Eric and Hannah have participated in the VHCB Farm Viability program and have received an implication grant from VHCB, but they were unable, even after mediation, to acquire the farm they were renting in Highgate.

The Sawyer Bay Farm is an ideal place for Eric and Hannah to continue and expand their farm operation and incorporate Bob and Joan into the farm operation.

### **III. Source of Funds**

The purchase price for the easement with the option to purchase at agricultural value is \$1,600,000. VHCB approved a grant for this project in the amount of \$654,000 (\$650,000 for easement purchase and \$4,000 for third-party costs). In addition, local fundraising totaling \$1,431,560 will be used toward the easement purchase and costs.

Because this is a first farm purchase by Eric and Hannah Noel and their partners, there is no farmer contribution. The VHCB grant for this project does not include any State funding for the easement purchase, only FRPP funding provided through NRCS. State funding for this project is limited to stewardship endowment and associated costs for the easement purchase through VLT's performance contract with VHCB. VLT and VHCB will report separately on the performance contract measures.

Sent from my iPad  
Gil Livingston  
President  
Vermont Land Trust