



Working Lands Coalition Partners

**The Center for an
Agricultural Economy**

**Green Mountain Dairy
Farmers Cooperative
Federation**

NOFA Vermont

**Preservation Trust of
Vermont**

Shelburne Farms

Smokey House Center

**Vermont Association
of Planning and
Development Agencies**

**Vermont Council on
Rural Development**

Vermont Land Trust

**Vermont Natural
Resources Council**

**The Vermont
Sustainable Jobs Fund**

**Vermont Wood
Manufacturers
Association**

**Vermont Woodlands
Association**

**The Woodstock
Foundation**

March 18, 2015

Dear Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

We understand the state is facing a difficult fiscal challenge and appreciate all you are able to do to maintain a strong economic and jobs development investment in the Working Lands Enterprise Fund.

It is reassuring that the House Agricultural and Forest Products Committee's recent memo to your committee requested that "Working Lands should receive a total of \$1.5 million, which was the governor's recommend for FY 2015." You may not know that their commitment to this investment strategy is so strong that they also introduced a committee bill that would raise new revenue from the Rooms Tax to support their request.

The Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEB) grows the economies, cultures, and communities of Vermont's working landscapes by investing in critical leverage points across Vermont's farm and forest sectors. In only two years, the Working Lands Enterprise Board has invested in 74 agricultural and forestry projects in all fourteen Vermont counties, distributing \$2.1 million dollars in Working Lands funds, and leveraging an additional \$3.1 million dollars in matching funds.

As you heard during Thursday's public comment hearing, these grants are having a real impact in our communities:

- Kelt Naylor from Sidehill Farm in Brattleboro added three new employees, increased sales by 20%, and sourced from six new local farms thanks to his WLEB grant.
- Teresa A. Kuczynski from the Vermont Solid Waste District Managers' Association received a \$55,000 WLEB Provider grant, which leveraged an additional \$44,829 in matching fund, and in only a year has already resulted in \$139,241 in new revenues for compost operators, and increased food scrap compost by 11.62%.
- David Hurwitz from the Guild of Vermont Furniture Makers in Randolph who was able to use a \$10,000 WLEB grant to hire a local web-design business and social media consultant to bring his business into the digital era and reach new out-of-state markets—a "game changer" for his business.

When WLEB grantees grow their businesses, they hire Vermonters, source from other Vermont businesses, protect Vermont's working landscape and grow the economy. As one grantee mentioned in his testimony, "if we had more Working Lands, not less, we would have a stronger Vermont economy and wouldn't be in the budget situation we are today."

By level funding WLEB we balance the budget in a way that sustainably grows Vermont's economy and means that future Legislatures will not have to face such tough choices.

Sincerely,



Paul Costello, *VCRD Executive Director*
For the Working Landscape Partnership and Coalition



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