

1 Introduced by Committee on Agriculture and Forestry

2 Date:

3 Subject: Agriculture; agricultural development

4 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to adopt  
5 multiple provisions related to improving the agricultural economy. The bill  
6 would require the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (Agency) to  
7 evaluate an Agricultural Loan Loss Reserve Fund to serve as credit  
8 enhancement for farmers and forest products businesses. The bill would  
9 appropriate additional funds to the Working Lands Program. The bill would  
10 require the Agency to report to the General Assembly regarding the  
11 prioritization and potential funding sources for additional farm and food  
12 business service providers needed to support the agricultural industry in  
13 Vermont. The bill would require the creation of a directory of legal and  
14 financial service providers who provide services or expertise needed by  
15 working lands businesses. The bill would appropriate funds for a grant to  
16 support the statewide direct market electronic benefit transfer doubling  
17 programs.

18 An act relating to the agricultural economy

1 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

2 \* \* \* Working Lands Program \* \* \*

3 Sec. 1. APPROPRIATIONS; WORKING LANDS PROGRAM

4 In fiscal year 2021, in addition to the \$1,300,000.00 otherwise appropriated  
5 to the program and pending availability of funding, \$200,000.00 is  
6 appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and  
7 Markets for grants to be awarded through the Vermont Working Lands  
8 program, pursuant to 6 V.S.A. chapter 207, subchapter 2.

9 \* \* \* Agricultural Loan Reserve Fund \* \* \*

10 Sec. 2. AGRICULTURAL LOAN LOSS RESERVE FUND; REPORT

11 The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets, in consultation with the  
12 Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, the Vermont Economic Development  
13 Authority, and other interested parties, shall evaluate the potential to create an  
14 Agricultural Loan Loss Reserve Fund in the State to serve as credit  
15 enhancement for farmers and forest products businesses that cannot obtain  
16 financing due to lack of collateral or other financing restrictions. On or before  
17 January 15, 2021, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall submit  
18 to the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and the Senate  
19 Committee on Agriculture a proposal for establishing an Agricultural  
20 Resources Fund in the State. The proposal shall:

1           (1) identify a financial lender or lenders or other institution that would  
2           administer the Fund;

3           (2) recommend criteria for use of the Fund by a lender, including  
4           whether the Fund would be available to buy down interest rates on loans or  
5           pay, in whole or in part, for defaults on loans and forest products; and

6           (3) estimate the amount funds necessary to capitalize the Fund,  
7           including the proposed source of the funds.

8                           \* \* \* Farm and Food Business Service Providers \* \* \*

9           Sec. 3. FARM AND FOOD BUSINESS SERVICE PROVIDERS; REPORT

10           On or before November 15, 2020, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and  
11           Markets shall submit to the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and  
12           the Senate Committee on Agriculture a report regarding the prioritization and  
13           potential funding sources for additional farm and food business service  
14           providers identified in the 2020 Agriculture Strategic Plan Report as necessary  
15           to support the agricultural industry in Vermont. In developing the report, the  
16           Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall consult with the Vermont  
17           Sustainable Jobs Fund and the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program  
18           and shall meet with relevant stakeholders.

1                   \* \* \* Directory of Financial Service Providers \* \* \*

2       Sec. 4. CREATION OF DIRECTORY OF LEGAL AND FINANCIAL  
3               SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR WORKING LANDS BUSINESSES;  
4               APPROPRIATIONS; **REPORT**

5               (a) On or before January 15, 2021, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Funds, in  
6               collaboration with the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program and other  
7               relevant stakeholders, shall develop a directory of legal and financial service  
8               providers, such as estate and corporate attorneys, accountants, or bookkeepers,  
9               who could provide services or expertise needed by working lands businesses in  
10              the State. The directory shall include:

11              (1) a listing of qualified legal and financial service providers in the State  
12              that have expertise that is relevant to the needs of working lands businesses;  
13              and

14              (2) a statement that provides a transparent accounting of how the  
15              directory was developed and how relevant legal or financial service providers  
16              can be listed in the directory.

17              (b) On or before January 15, 2021, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund  
18              shall submit to the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and the  
19              Senate Committee on Agriculture, a report that:

20              (1) proposes an entity to maintain the directory;

21              (2) estimates the annual cost to operate and update the directory; and

