

February 18, 2021

Dear House Appropriations Committee Members:

We, the members of the Rural Economic Development Working Group, write to urge you to support the Governor's proposal to invest \$3.5million in the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative for Fiscal Year 2022. We believe this investment at this time could be a critical catalyst for recovery as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know that investing in our farm and forest products businesses creates jobs, keeps young entrepreneurs in Vermont, strengthens our food system and leverages more funding for these businesses, and we hope that you will direct these funds towards this purpose, as proposed by the governor.

Per a report submitted last week by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, during the 8 years the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative has been in place, it has distributed approximately \$7million in grant funds to 241 agriculture and forest products businesses, thus leveraging an additional \$11 million in other funding for these businesses. 524 new jobs have been created with these investments, and over \$36 million in gross sales have been generated by these businesses. We know this program works, and that small investments in our working lands enterprises can have big results.

Thank you for considering our request and for the hard work you do developing the budget.

Sincerely,

Rep. John Arrison  
Rep. Sarita Austin  
Rep. Matt Birong  
Rep. Thomas Bock  
Rep. Seth Bongartz  
Rep. Erin Brady  
Rep. Scott Campbell  
Rep. Sara Coffey  
Rep. Peter Conlon  
Rep. Kari Dolan  
Rep. David Durfee  
Rep. John Gannon  
Rep. Lisa Hango  
Rep. Lori Houghton  
Rep. Kathleen James  
Rep. Stephanie Jerome

Rep. Paul Lefebvre  
Rep. Logan Nicoll  
Rep. Robert Norris  
Rep. Terry Norris  
Rep. Carol Ode  
Rep. Woodman Page  
Rep. Kelly Pajala  
Rep. Lucy Rogers  
Rep. Laura Sibilila  
Rep. Katherine Sims  
Rep. Gabrielle Stebbins  
Rep. Kirk White  
Rep. Terri Williams  
Rep. Theresa Wood  
Rep. Michael Yantachka