



## Vermont Working Lands Coalition

August 12, 2014

Joint Fiscal Committee  
Vermont Statehouse  
109 State Street  
Montpelier, Vermont 05609-0201

Dear Members of the Joint Fiscal Committee,

The Vermont Working Enterprise Fund (WLEB), an economic development investment strategy, is a crucial instrument for the State of Vermont to create jobs and advance enterprises in the working lands economy. While we recognize the fiscal challenge facing the state budget, we respectfully request you reject the Administration's proposal for a 20 percent reduction to this program.

More than 1,000 new jobs have been created in the food system and working lands sector of the economy in the past few years proving that investment in this hot sector is a winner. A substantial reduction at this moment in time will both send a bad signal to the businesses in this sector and deny the state the economic growth these grants foster.

WLEB is working. It is producing jobs, growing business, and fostering a palpable sense of vibrancy in the food, forest and value-added sectors of our economy.

The Working Lands Enterprise Fund:

- Creates JOBS in Working Lands Enterprises
- Keeps YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS in Vermont
- Builds NEW MARKETS for value-added products
- Increases CAPACITY for in-state production
- Leverages MORE INVESTMENT for growing enterprises

While relatively new, WLEB already has a proven track record. In 2013, \$1M of WLEB investments went into 37 agriculture and forestry enterprises reaching every county in the state, creating 45 jobs, and increasing recipient businesses and gross receipts by approximately \$145K each.

In the first part of 2014, there were a total of 129 letters of intent and application grant requests totaling \$5.1M. In the first round of awards, 37 projects were supported reaching every county and leveraging \$1.8M of additional investment.

We deeply appreciate the General Assembly's leadership on this effort and encourage you to reject the Administration's proposal to seriously reduce the investment activity in the economy through the Working Land Enterprise Fund.

Thanks so much and all the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Costello". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Costello".

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

Vermont Working Lands Coalition Members

- The Center for an Agricultural Economy
- Green Mountain Dairy Farmers Cooperative
- NOFA VT
- Preservation Trust of Vermont
- Shelburne Farms
- The Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Vermont Council on Rural Development
- The Vermont Farm Bureau
- The Vermont Land Trust
- The Vermont Natural Resources Council
- The Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association
- The Vermont Woodlands Association
- The Woodstock Foundation