

The Working Lands Enterprise Fund Will Stimulate Growth of Vermont's Rural Economy

Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Investment Bill (H. 496/S. 246)



By strategically investing in capitalization and technical assistance, Vermont can dramatically expand the number and success of its working lands enterprises. With a menu of grants, loans, and financial packaging of existing funding sources, as well as technical and regulatory assistance, the Board will be providing entrepreneurs with a one-stop-shop for economic development activities.

Potential Projects that could be supported with the Working Lands Enterprise Investment Fund

Start-Up Businesses that Add Value to Farm and Forest Products

With loans and grants, the Fund can spur new business by providing startup capital where it is currently very difficult to obtain. These startup funds would be available to business that meets criteria that will be developed by the Board. These could include furniture makers, food producers, farmers' markets, and many others.

Growing Businesses that Add Jobs

Many young working lands businesses lack the equity needed in order to obtain capital for growth projects, and thus cannot add jobs, even as their markets expand. The Board will have the authority to identify and provide funds for growth projects that show promise but need help. The Board will not fund the entire project, but strategically use its funds to leverage additional funding from other sources, while providing technical assistance to pull together the financial packaging. Some examples of this type of growth opportunity might be a small baking business that needs equipment and space to produce more product, or a farm that wants to add a greenhouse to extend its growing season, or a mill that wants to add a kiln to his business to offer more products for sale.

Value-Added Businesses that Need Technical Assistance

Many times, a value-added processors biggest hurdle is navigating the regulatory process. The Working Lands Enterprise Investment Fund will provide support to organizations that can assist entrepreneurs with all the steps they need to take to be successful with their business. The Fund may also provide technical assistance with business planning and financial planning, to ensure that the Working Lands enterprises are as strong as they can be. Perhaps a farm wants to add a cheese making facility or a light processing facility for produce. Or, a maple producer wants to add a small facility to make artisan bowls. These types of entrepreneurs would know where to go to ask for help, and the assistance would be available.

Infrastructure Businesses that Will Help Our Rural Economy Grow

Core processing, storage, and distribution facilities are needed to allow related businesses to grow and to build markets throughout the region and the nation. The Working Lands Enterprise Fund will allow for investment in needed infrastructure across the state to allow our Working Lands economy to thrive. The state will not own the businesses, but rather will support entrepreneurs who want to fill the niches that the market offers. Sawmills, kilns, slaughterhouses, and storage facilities are some examples of projects that could benefit from the funding.

Three Key Areas of Investment:

1. **Enterprise grants** to small and start-up businesses
2. **Wrap-around services** to working lands enterprise businesses that are starting up or are in growth phase
3. **Infrastructure investments** to support the working lands enterprise economy

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