



Key Findings of the VCRD Summit on the Future of Vermont's Working Landscape held on December 10, 2010 at the Vermont State House

Participants at the Summit on the Future of Vermont's Working Landscape shared their commitment to advancing the enterprise that serve as the foundation for the future vitality of rural lands and rural communities. Five afternoon breakout sessions reviewed the five point [Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Action Plan](#) and offered their advice to improve it and initiate a campaign to implement it.

This Summit report attempts to categorically summarize the key ideas expressed. It will be used by the Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Council as a starting point for the improvement of the plan and a guide to advance its implementation.

How Can the Action Plan Be Strengthened?

- Renewable energy is an important element in the farm and forest economy. Clearly renewable projects, from biomass to wind, solar and methane can support enterprise viability and contribute to the working landscape; they should be among the investments made by the Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Investment Corporation. Clean energy investment in farm and forest operations can build models that lower Vermont's carbon footprint, reduce greenhouse gases and phosphorus run off, clean the lake and provide additional environmental benefits.
- The Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Investment Corporation should be renamed as "The Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Fund."
- The Action Plan doesn't say enough about education and there are several programs or opportunities that should be considered:
 - Expanding the SEED program at UVM
 - Building incentives for young people who apprentice in farm or forest enterprises.
 - Expanding food education, farm visits, and local foods in schools.
 - Expanding Voc-Tech programs for loggers and farmers.

- The tax element in section D in the Action Plan needs to be considered more thoroughly. The Council should systematically evaluate other potential revenue sources:
 - License plate, vehicular registration, or Tax Form check off donations
 - Property Transfer Tax
 - As VT evaluates expanding the sales tax base and the lowering the tax rate, there could be an opportunity to fund working lands action elements in a marginal increase in total revenue.
 - Farm Aid style events
 - Gas/Fuels Tax

- It will be crucial to maintain the Use Value Appraisal program—if this goes the game is lost...but don't tie this whole discussion down in the details of that debate.

- The Action Plan needs to be more clear that this is about Jobs, Investments in farm and forest enterprises will have return in short term job creation and long term land use. More data should be gathered and reviewed to evaluate this.

- There are problems with town plans which may not be incorporating plans for forest holdings or agriculture into the future. Put simply, towns should be planning for agriculture and for forests. Towns need leadership in terms of state level goals communicated through a planning office. Towns need some best practices and tools to advance this sort of planning.

- Part E on State Planning Coordination should connect down to local town plans and encourage working landscape planning at both ends of the scale. Town plans should directly connect and recognize “Working Lands” in supporting strategic public investment in prime agricultural and important forest lands. Towns could be bonding for the working landscape and planning more effectively for it—planning commissions can lead. Local planning and zoning need to integrate regionally and at the state level; this should connect to a statewide plan under the State Planning Office and Development Cabinet.

- Can we quantify environmental benefits and ecological services of forest and farm land? Can we quantify their value for tourism? The Working Lands category should include a more explicit definition of “Eco-System Services” in addition to the focus on products.

- The Partnership should look to build on existing programs and organizations, not build an entirely new structure: VHCB, VSJF, VEDA have capacity and could be foundations for the Agriculture and Forest Products Development Corporation. Organize for the collaborative management of new resources. This links to the recently created Agriculture Development Board which should include forest products development, and to the Agriculture Innovation Center funding at the

- The Secretary of ANR should be listed as a proposed member of the Development Cabinet in part E.
- The Working Lands Category, part C, needs more work. Could recreational lands receive that designation? When we think of Working Lands maybe we need to think of a partnership that includes forest, farm and recreational enterprises.
- The Celebratory Campaign in section A should contain elements aimed at youth—instilling a sense of pride and possibility around the working landscape economy in youth and reinforcing a Vermont land ethic.
- Work with Farm to Plate, the Agency of Agriculture and other partners with expertise in the particular infrastructure and other systemic needs in order to further articulate these parts of the plan.
- The current Action Plan talks about some incentives for infrastructure and new buildings on “Working Lands” —we should include existing barns for renovation and re-use and to maintain that working heritage.
- Connect to national and regional initiatives like the NE Governor’s Council and the national Great American Outdoors Initiatives.
- Be more explicit that the Ag and Forest Products Development Corporation will attract private sector capital, ‘slow money’, philanthropic dollars and other working assets to support farm and forest enterprises.

What Should be Done to Advance the Platform?

- A major public education program will be needed to go from this committed group to reach those who may care but do not think about these issues regularly.
- This agenda needs to tie to the Preservation agenda that supports communities and downtowns. It’s important to build a big tent coalition that includes those who want to conserve built heritage, cultural traditions, and traditional rural recreation access.
- The campaign must unite and encourage leadership—starting with the Governor. Part E will particularly need leadership by the Governor and would probably best work as an executive order—if the administration doesn’t find a use for this structure it will not be instituted or come into its own.

What Organizations Offered to Help Do?

- Regional Planning Commissions and VAPDA are eager to serve as stakeholders in support of a state planning office.
- UVM's Food Systems Spire (from the Spires of Excellence Initiative) will be on point in advancing education and research where food systems and land use intersect.
- Individual offers to take the 5 point Action Plan to the local library, town offices, Barre Farm Show.
- The Agency of Agriculture understands the connection of food systems, forest products and economic development and will be a dynamic partner advancing efforts that connect to this platform.
- Local planning commissions can get engaged by looking forward around subdivision issues and planning for ag and forest needs.
- Involve the Transition Towns groups in advancing the platform, especially part A.
- The Center for Research on Vermont can help hosting public forums and taping them.
- Individual Towns could hold forums on the Working Landscape led, potentially, by local Planning or Conservation Commissions. Local Conservation Commissions played a leading role in engaging people to support VHCB's initial development.
- Shelburne Farms, Billings Farm and other regional working landscape hub institutions could provide public education around the working landscape campaign.



Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development
PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601 | 802-223-6091 | info@vtrural.org | www.vtrural.org