



# THE WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE: SUPPORTING VERMONT'S WORKING LANDSCAPE FISCAL YEAR 2023 IMPACT REPORT




*Joe's Brook Farm, Kathline Chery of Kalche Wine Cooperative, Bissonnette Firewood*

## About the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI)

It is deeply satisfying to examine the impact of WLEI. In eleven years, WLEI has invested \$15.6 million in 446 farm, food, and forestry projects and leveraged an additional \$24.6M in matching funds.

In 2012, the Vermont Legislature and Governor Shumlin created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF), which was tasked with investing in Vermont's working lands enterprises to strengthen our rural economy, advance job creation, expand the number of acres in active food and forest production, and protect our environment. The Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) was tasked with administering the program and is made up of 20 members throughout the supply chains of agriculture and forestry, and staff from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, Vermont Economic Development Authority, and Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund.

*Giddings Hill Forest Products*



***“The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative invests in Vermonters who are the backbone of the Green Mountains. They are keeping our rural communities vibrant while growing Vermont’s economy. We rely on the grant recipients to feed us, keep us warm, and produce world class products that improve our lives. It’s important we continue to invest in Vermonters who are making their living off the land. Their creativity and hard work are inspirational.”***

**– Anson Tebbetts  
Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets**

# WLEI Strategically Invests in Businesses and Service Provider Organizations

**Business Grants:** We make strategic investments in working lands businesses that are poised for growth, can influence their value chain, spur innovation, create jobs, boost sales, increase production, and preserve or increase working lands acreage.

**Service Provider Grants and Contracts:** We invest in business and technical assistance service providers who work directly with working lands enterprises to support them as they grow, pivot, and adapt to an ever-changing marketplace, or prepare for new capital investment or an intergenerational transfer.

**Producer Association Grants:** We invest in the organizational development of VT-based producer associations supporting their members with technical assistance, marketing, research, and development.

**Trade Show Assistance Grants:** We invest in agriculture and forestry businesses' marketing and promoting their Vermont products at out-of-state trade shows.

Fiscal Year	Funds Available	Total Funding Requests
2023	\$2,000,000	\$10,525,717
2022	\$5,594,000	\$10,109,747
2021	\$594,000	\$2,043,716
2020	\$1,594,000	\$5,015,147
2019	\$700,000	\$1,178,287
2018	\$694,000	\$1,902,316

Until 2023, the annual base appropriation for WLEF was \$594,000. In 2023, the annual base appropriation increased to \$1,000,000. Funds available beyond these base amounts were the result of special appropriations to WLEF.

# Program Impact

## 2012–2023

Funded **446** projects

Distributed **\$15.6M** in Working Lands funds

Leveraged **\$24.6M** in matching funds

Benefitted **14** counties



## Within two years of completing a grant, Working Lands Business grantees have:

Employed **1,135** people

Created **540** new jobs

Benefitted **24,985** acres

Generated over **\$92M** in sales

*Sunrise Orchards*

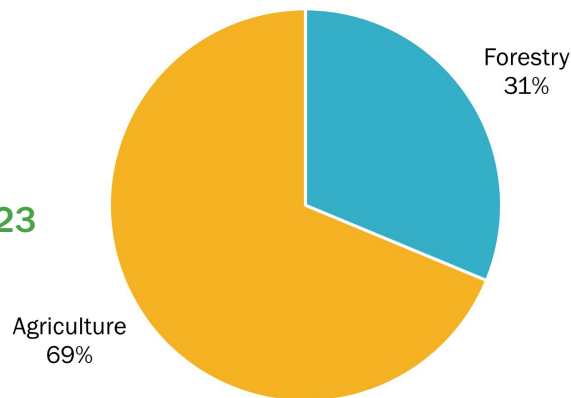


# What Business Sectors Receive Working Lands Grants?

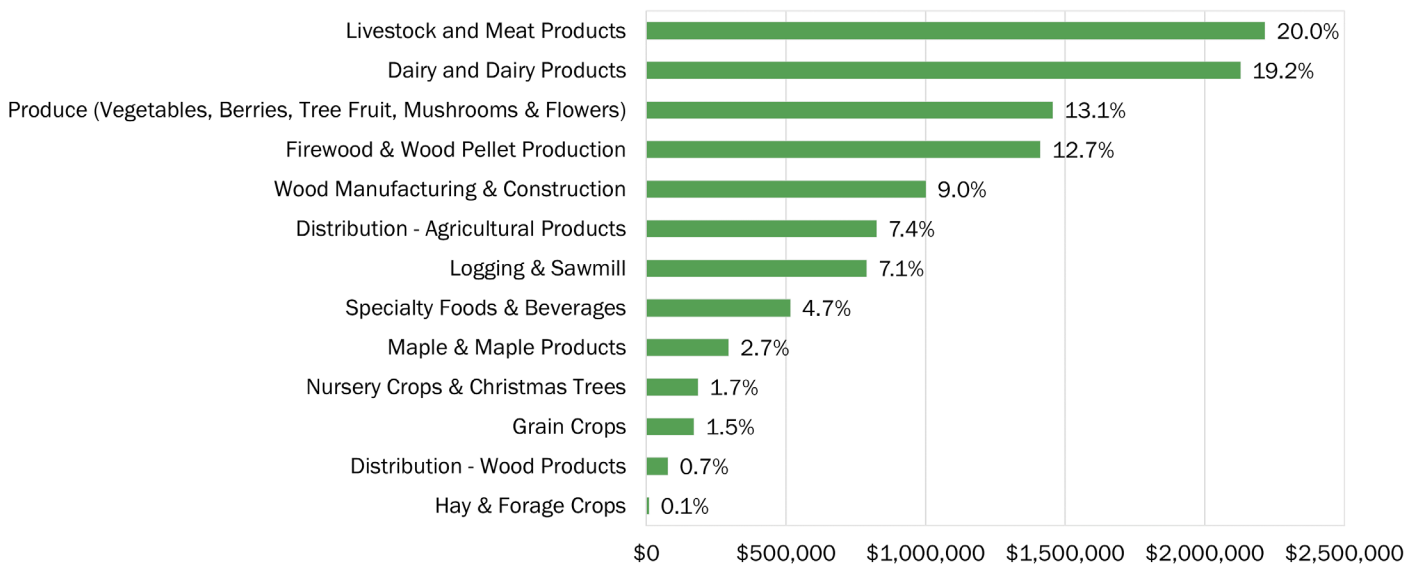
Working Lands business grants touch all sectors of Vermont’s working lands economies. WLEI and the governing board are committed to stimulating economic development in both the agricultural and forestry sectors of Vermont. From 2012 to 2023, The Working Lands Enterprise Fund has awarded over \$11 million dollars directly to working lands businesses.

To support strategic investments each year, the Working Lands Enterprise Board focuses on filling critical gaps and seizing opportunities for maximum impact. In agriculture, dairy and meat products make up the bulk of investments. Produce operations and value-added agricultural products have also been key areas of grantmaking. Forestry makes up about a third of WLEI business grant investments to date, with wood manufacturing and construction businesses using local wood, receiving the most investments. Primary forestry, logging, and sawmill operations also represent a critical sector of Vermont’s working lands economy and WLEI grant investments. In recent years, the Working Lands Enterprise Board has sought to increase funding specifically to forestry businesses, including those involved in wood heat and energy like pellet mills and firewood processors.

## INVESTMENTS TO AGRICULTURE VS. FORESTRY BUSINESSES, 2012-2023

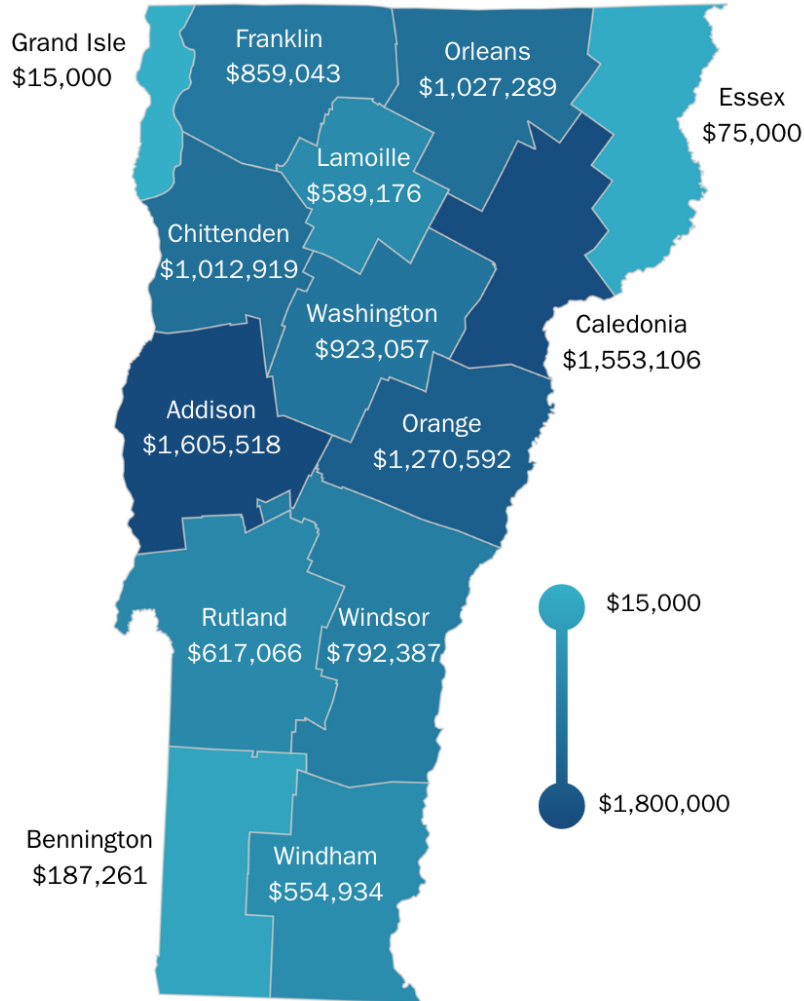


## DISTRIBUTION OF GRANT FUNDS TO BUSINESSES PER SECTOR, 2012-2023



# Where do Working Lands Grants Go?

Working Lands Enterprise Initiative business grantees hail from all corners of Vermont. Most investments from the past 11 years have gone to Orleans, Caledonia, and Orange Counties, with significant investments in Addison, Chittenden, and Washington. We are currently exploring collaborations aimed at increasing investments in Essex, Bennington, and Grand Isle counties.



*Business grant totals displayed here do not include Trade Show Assistance Grants.*



MKVT Farm

## Fiscal Year 2023 Program Overview

Fiscal year (FY) 2023 brought historic grantmaking to the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, and demand for grant programs reached its highest point yet. In FY 2023, 77% of grant funds to businesses supported the agriculture sector with 23% invested in the forestry sector.

In FY 2023, special appropriations from the legislature increased WLEI's grantmaking budget from the annual \$1 million base allocation to \$3 million. Of these funds, \$2 million were American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds specifically for primary agricultural and forestry businesses. To raise awareness and allow businesses time to prepare their projects, WLEB allocated \$1 million in ARPA funds in FY 2023 and saved \$1 million for FY 2024 investments. WLEB leveraged the special appropriations to make transformational investments of up to \$250,000, with priority given to projects that create new opportunities for multiple businesses in their respective supply chains. This year, the Standard Business Grant was renamed the Business Enhancement Grant, and the maximum funding request increased from \$25,000 to \$35,000 to account for increased costs affecting businesses.

*Faruk and Holly Menguc of Tup's Crossing Farm*





Total funds awarded **\$2,188,773**

Number of awards made **51**

Matching funds leveraged **\$2,112,003**

Counties benefited **13**

Total funds requested **\$10,525,717**

Number of applicants **169**



## Service Provider Investments

### **Center for Women & Enterprise**

\$20,000 for business planning for women-owned working lands businesses

### **Clean Economy Works**

\$20,000 for energy audits and grant writing support for farms

### **Northeast Forests Vermont Forest Business School**

\$65,000 for training and business coaching program

### **Northern Vermont University**

\$20,000 for Forest Products Accelerator program

### **Vermont Housing and Conservation Board**

\$99,655 for business assistance services for the forest economy

### **Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund**

\$100,000 for developing a supply chain for beef-on-dairy terminal crossbred animals

### **Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund**

\$70,000 for VT Forest Industry Network development

### **Vermont Woodworking School**

\$19,497 for computer lab to train students in cutting edge CAD and rendering software



Norah Lake and baby Fern of Sweetland Farm

## Producer Association Grants

### **Real Organic Project**

\$10,000 for Real Organic Project farm and label promotion

### **Vermont Brewers Association**

\$19,500 for strengthening and supporting member brewers through streamlined access to local sources

### **Vermont Dairy Producers Alliance**

\$10,000 for VDPA legislative & regulatory outreach and education to increase farmer participation

## Business Grants

### **Bissonnette Firewood, Bristol**

\$157,951 for upgrading firewood kiln and drying equipment

### **Boyden Farm, Cambridge**

\$133,609 for infrastructure, HR, financial, and marketing systems for sustainable growth

### **Dhaurali Goats, Colchester**

\$99,500 for upgrading goat slaughter facility to obtain VT state meat inspection

### **Dorset Peak Jerseys, Danby**

\$35,000 for improved sheep and lamb production infrastructure for increased profitability

### **Fort Waite Holsteins, Corinth**

\$35,000 for bunk silo infrastructure to reduce non-recyclable plastic waste and increase feeding efficiency

### **Giddings Hill Forest Products, Enosburg**

\$60,000 for new forwarder to provide safe, reliable, efficient machine for logging operation new employee

### **Joe's Brook Farm, Barnet**

\$35,000 for tie stall barn conversion to vegetable production, storage, and sales infrastructure

### **Kalche Wine Cooperative, Fletcher**

\$35,000 to streamline efficiency and safety in packaging to increase production

### **Sweetland Farm, Norwich**

\$35,000 for an electric tractor to support transition to fossil-carbon-free farming

### **Lemington Maple Farm, Canaan**

\$35,000 for installation of grid power lines and a road to replace diesel generated power, improve sugarhouse accessibility, and allow for business growth

**LSF Forest Products, Fletcher**

\$35,000 for stormwater mitigation sitework for sawmill expansion

**Mama’s Farm, Williston**

\$32,000 for relocation and construction of chicken housing and slaughter facility to newly purchased farm property to serve refugee community customers

**Miller Farm, Vernon**

\$30,000 for energy efficient milk storage capacity improvement

**MKVT Farm, Glover**

\$35,000 for freezer and farm sales expansion

**Mud City Farm, Morrisville**

\$78,000 for establishing maple sap collection

**Mureta’s Butcher Shop, Northfield**

\$35,000 for construction and installation of equipment required to become a certified slaughterhouse

**NOFA-VT (for Vermont Organic Farmers), Richmond**

\$24,000 for organic market research & consumer insights

**Old Soul Farm, Barre**

\$25,500 for barn renovation to increase business viability, revenue, and provide year-round access to local food

**Redstart, Inc., Bradford**

\$70,000 for restoration nursery expansion

**Riverview Farm, Franklin**

\$171,649 for net zero farmworker housing

**Stark Mountain Woodworking, New Haven**

\$35,000 for developing new market opportunity bringing Vermont hardwood custom furnishings from tree to consumer

**Stonewood Farm, Orwell**

\$66,300 for slaughter plant improvements and additional turkey poult brooder space

**Sunrise Orchards, Cornwall**

\$250,000 for cidery and farmstand for farm income diversification

**Tup’s Crossing Farm, Orwell**

\$24,596 for utility tractor for pasture and land management

**Walnut Hill Farm, Pawlet**

\$34,675 for processing certified organic corn into masa harina

**Wooden Hammer, N. Ferrisburgh**

\$25,000 for purchase, installation, and training of new CNC machine

**Trade Show Assistance Grants**

**Butterworks Farm, Westfield – \$2,500**

**Eden Ice Cider Company, Newport – \$4,065**

**Food Connects, Brattleboro – \$4,150**

**Grand Isle Ice Cream Company, Williston – \$3,755**

**Mad River Distillers, Warren – \$2,175**

**Mixed Up Nut Butter, Colchester – \$4,263**

**Runamok Maple, Fairfax – \$3,048**

**Sawyer Made, Woodbury – \$4,830**

**Shrubblly, Hinesburg – \$5,000**

**VT Dog Eats, Waitsfield – \$5,000**

**VT Farmstead Cheese Co., Woodstock – \$3,555**

**VT Nut Free Chocolates, Colchester – \$5,000**

**Von Trapp Farmstead, Waitsfield – \$5,000**



# Giddings Hill Forest Products

## Cut-to-Length Method Makes Logging More Sustainable in the Face of Climate Change

“With more warm winters and wet summers, I had a ton of downtime,” Benjamin Lepesqueur, a first-generation logger, said of his business increasingly coming to a halt.

“If you want to log full time, you have to figure out a way to get into the woods...we just don’t have the weather we had ten to fifteen years ago,” Lepesqueur, who owns Giddings Hill Forest Products in Bakersfield, said.

Skidding wood, a conventional logging practice used to drag a tree by a cable to a landing where it can be cut and loaded onto trucks, must be done with firm, stable ground conditions. Climate change has led to more severe weather and less time in the woods for Vermont loggers.

“You’re putting a ton of weight and tractive force on the ground...You’re pulling against standing trees, which damages them, and you’re making ruts,” he said of the labor-intensive process he’d been using for over a decade. Lepesqueur got his undergraduate degree in geology in 2007 and graduated into the recession. He started logging for others and eventually started his own business.

“Physically, I was also pretty beat up after 12 years of that, so I wanted to get into mechanized logging,” Lepesqueur said.

In 2021, he began the switch to cut-to-length (CTL) harvesting – a method of logging first developed in Scandinavian countries as a low-impact alternative, for both the environment and loggers, when compared to the conventional skidding method. A CTL harvester fells, de-limbs, and cuts the tree into usable lengths in the forest to be transported by a forwarder. A forwarder carries the wood to the landing, which is a staging area where it is prepped for road transport.

Because the forwarder loads and carries the forest products to the landing (rather than the operator needing to get in and out to chain trees to a skidder), it is less physically demanding on loggers. The erosion and downslope transport of sediment is vastly minimized, Lepesqueur said. The wheels of the forwarder are fitted with tracks to better distribute the weight of the machine and reduce soil compaction, too. It also makes logging more profitable.

“When you’re mechanized, you can cut so much faster that you can make money on cutting lower-grade wood. It increases the number of jobs you can profit from because you’re not as reliant on high-quality wood,” Lepesqueur said.

Lepesqueur estimates he can do jobs in half the time with the CTL method compared to skidding while increasing his gross sales by nearly 20 percent.

Yet, the new system was so much faster that it started to bottleneck with only one person. He needed a designated forwarder operator. Unfortunately, the forwarder he owned was slow, unreliable, and unsafe for an employee.

In 2023, he received a \$60,000 Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Grant to upgrade his forwarder. He is currently searching for an employee to help him with logging as well as managing firewood delivery and the farm’s 7,000-tap maple sugarbush. He says the upgrade also helps maintain a healthier forest.

“Most foresters are leaning into this cut-to-length method now. You’re leaving a lot more woody debris in the forest and allowing the nutrient base to build up,” Lepesqueur said of his desire to be a good steward of the land. “Farms in Vermont have gotten through to the general public that local farming is good; local food is good. We are local tree farmers, and we’re doing the same thing.”

- **Grant Award:** \$60,000
- **Applicant Match:** \$80,000
- **Project:** New forwarder to increase logging productivity by 25% and provide a safe low impact machine for new employee.

*“When you’re mechanized, you can cut so much faster that you can make money on cutting lower-grade wood...”*



# Mama's Farm

## Move to Williston Brings More Customers to Mama's Farm



Hyacinthe Ayingeneye and Theogene Mahoro of Mama's Farm

There is increasing interest among New Americans in Vermont for locally grown meat and vegetables produced in the traditions of their home countries.

“Sourcing fresh food like they used to eat back in their homeland is what attracts people to the farm,” Theogene Mahoro of Mama’s Farm in Williston said of the nearly 3,000 free-range meat chickens they sell each year, dozens of sheep and goats for meat, along with eggs and vegetables. “Many customers have different ways they want their meat slaughtered. For example, Muslim customers like meat to be slaughtered in a certain way so it can be halal.”

Theogene Mahoro and his wife, Hyacinthe Ayingeneye, the owners of Mama’s Farm in Williston, came to Vermont as refugees from Rwanda. They have been meeting the need for culturally-specific foods since they established their farm in 2015 on leased land at Pine Island Community Farm in Colchester, while it was owned by the Vermont Land Trust.

In August of 2022, they took the leap to farm ownership and purchased five acres of farmland in Williston, with a house, apartment, and two small barns. It was made possible with support from the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board’s Farm & Forest Viability Program, the Vermont Economic Development Authority, the Vermont Land Trust, and the Intervale Center’s farm business planning group.

Beyond transferring their animals and equipment to the new farm site, they also needed to find nearly \$85,000 to transfer their facilities – an inspected slaughter facility erected by the Vermont Land Trust in 2021 and a superstructure barn. Without the funds, they faced having to leave the barn behind. Not knowing when the barn would be moved, their chickens were housed in Williston in half a dozen small huts, which increased the time for feeding and slaughtering, ultimately decreasing their profitability. That’s about to change, though.

Thanks in part to a \$32,000 Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Grant, the slaughterhouse and superstructure were moved to the property in 2023. The slaughterhouse became operational in September and the superstructure is nearly finished. Mahoro says it’s going to allow them to scale up their business. They expect to increase their gross annual sales by 75 percent from \$51,925 to \$91,000.

“Just getting up and running in the first year in Williston ate up our savings; moving forward, we are going to be able to save money, which we hope will allow us to expand,” Mahoro said. “We have been struggling with attracting customers in the wintertime – when they come, they either stay in the car or stay outside in the cold; sometimes five to ten show up at the same time; we would like to have a sheltered place for them to be, which could also be a farm store.”

Mahoro says customers interested in meat simply stop by the farm to hand-select their animal for slaughter, and often buy eggs and veggies, too. Their primary customers are New Americans from Southeast Asia and Africa, they say. The farm is the busiest in May for Ramadan and in October for Nepalese and Bhutanese religious festivals. Since they moved to Williston, they’ve added to their customer base and have become busier during the Christmas holiday season. “Recently, we started having regular Americans coming to buy chickens and eggs, which is quite new for us because at the other farm, we never had that,” Mahoro said. “People are finding out we provide fresh meat, eggs, and vegetables, so we are having a new community tapping into the farm.”

- **Grant Award:** \$32,000
- **Applicant Match:** \$32,510
- **Project:** Reinstallation of a slaughterhouse and the construction of a Superstructure barn, which allows for more efficient and secure production and feeding practices.



*“The project is going to allow the Mahoro’s to scale up their business. They expect to increase their gross annual sales by 75 percent.”*

## Clean Economy Works

### Farms Access Federal Funds for Energy Improvements with Free Technical Assistance

Farming is a demanding job. So, even when millions of dollars in energy efficiency grants become available to farmers, many don't have the time or expertise to conduct energy assessments and write grant applications.

"We've known we needed to upgrade the refrigerators and the freezers in the farm stand for some time, and we've known about USDA Rural Development, but it is hard to access those grants," Eric Skovsted said. Skovsted and his wife, Mary, own and operate Joe's Brook Farm, a 15-acre certified organic vegetable farm in Barnet.

Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) Grants are available to assist small businesses or farms in Vermont and across the U.S. with energy efficiency improvements or renewable energy projects. Millions of dollars have been set aside, and agriculture producers can get up to 50 percent financial assistance for projects improving energy efficiency.

Fortunately, Clean Economy Works (CEW) specializes in energy efficiency and is interested in helping farms, like Joe's Brook, get the grants they need to run their operations more efficiently.

"We thought, why don't we streamline and partner with the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture to provide technical assistance to make it easy for farmers to execute the energy audits, and we write the grants for free," said Todd Campbell, owner of CEW.

The consulting firm provides strategic planning and project management for economic development projects. They received a \$20,000 matching grant from the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative to work with eight farms in Vermont to identify projects and apply for REAP grants at no cost to the farmers. Stonyfield Organic also contributed \$5,000.

CEW obtained a REAP grant for Joe's Brook Farm for three energy-efficient coolers and two freezers to be installed in the farm's two historic barns where they store and sell their fresh produce. After the equipment is paid off in five years, the farm will save 60 percent or nearly \$2,000 annually on electricity.

"It's doing three things. It's helping us reduce our carbon footprint, save money on our utilities, and also give our business an option to grow as it finds new markets," Skovsted said of the benefits they expect from upgrading their aging refrigeration system.

Additional farms working with CEW on energy efficiency projects and REAP grants include Miller Dairy Farm in Vernon, Bennett Family Farm Stand in St. Johnsbury, and Boyden Valley Wine & Spirits in Cambridge.

"These are the businesses we want to see succeed in our communities," Senior Project Manager Pete Schweigert of CEW said.

Schweigert says the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 allocated unprecedented amounts of one-time funding to the REAP program, making this the ideal time for these projects.

"The grants might not be around for long. So, part of what we're doing is saying, let's try to get as much of this to regional farm and forestry businesses that we value while it's available," Schweigert said. Campbell chimed in, "We're making hay while the sun shines."

- **Grant Award:** \$20,000
- **Applicant Match:** \$22,790
- **Project:** Technical assistance to 8 farms to access USDA Rural Energy for America funds to make energy efficiency improvements and install solar panels, with the goal of offsetting current energy usage with clean, renewable energy.





***“Clean Economy Works specializes in energy efficiency and is interested in helping farms, like Joe’s Brook, get the grants they need to run their operations more efficiently.”***



## Mud City Farm

### Mud City Farm Increases its Viability by Diversifying into Maple

In 2019, Kari Anderson and Chris Redder purchased 180 acres of conserved farmland in Morrisville. Once a dairy farm, the land had been defunct for over 30 years. The husband-and-wife team began the arduous process of restoring it and shifting their idea of what defines meaningful work.

“We like being here on land and have claimed allegiance to that,” Redder explained.

Their homage to the land, Mud City Farm, was unofficially born in 2015 when they began renting the land they now own from the Lepine family, restoring the fields, and putting up greenhouses for flowers and vegetables. Their flower farm, Pistil Production, provides wholesale flowers for weddings and events across New England. Over the last several years, they’ve planted hundreds of Christmas trees to add to their operation. Now, they’re gearing up to get into the maple industry.

“We’re just trying to take a step back, be stewards, [and] take care of ourselves,” Redder said of the couple’s journey from working for other people most of their lives to owning their own business and restoring their historic farm.

Their next step is restoring a once-productive sugarbush on their land to capture one of Vermont’s most prized harvests – sap for maple syrup. The couple says adding multiple revenue streams to their farm is a way to safeguard themselves against market volatility, whether from climate change or a pandemic. Plus, as a young, first-generation farm, it brings them closer to financial freedom.

“We have debt and a mortgage, and this is a revenue stream that contributes to it, and in three to five years, the capital investment will have a return; it’s a way for us to connect with our property and make some income,” Redder said of the maple operation.

Both have worked for larger sugaring operations and will begin by selling sap to nearby maple producers. “We want to boil eventually, but right now, the barrier to entry into that was just too big,” Redder said.

They expect the sap sales will increase Mud City’s annual gross sales by 65 percent from \$35,000 to \$58,000 and allow them to create a part-time job, with more potential if they can make syrup eventually.

“We’re taking steps to become a more mature business,” Redder said.

Redder will complete the installation of 4,000 taps, tubing, and other sap collection equipment in the spring of 2024. It was made possible partly by a \$78,000 grant from the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative.

“It essentially cut the cost of the project in half,” Redder said, “It allowed us to hire a little bit of the work out and created a higher percentage of success that we can get it done in the spring to see the benefits sooner.”

Phase one of the project was completed in 2023 and included removing a decaying plastic tubing system discarded in the woods with spouts, nails, and wire left in trees, as well as restoring trails and access roads. They say the work is rewarding as they watch their land and lives transform.

“It’s a lifelong adventure,” Anderson said, “And it’s fun.”

- **Grant Award:** \$78,000
- **Applicant Match:** \$67,000
- **Project:** Diversifying farm revenue by establishing a maple sap collection operation on 60 acres.

*“They expect the sap sales will increase Mud City’s annual gross sales by 65 percent and allow them to create a part-time job.”*



## Fort Waite Farm

### Feed Storage Improvements Make Fort Waite Farm More Sustainable



Mary and Elijah White of Fort Waite Farm

The new concrete bunk silo at Fort Waite Farm in Corinth is a triple win. It's reducing plastic use, cutting down fuel consumption, and making feeding the cows less time-consuming – positive efficiencies for the environment and the farm's bottom line.

"We've cut our feeding time in half. So, there's immense fuel savings there. Plus, less waste on garbage because there's less plastic thrown away," said Elijah White, who co-owns and operates the dairy farm with his wife, Mary. Their two children are the 6th generation to grow up on the 300-acre farm.

"We farm because it's what we love," Elijah said.

As the couple looked to make the farm sustainable amidst rising input costs and labor shortages, feed storage was at the top of the list.

"Every little thing you can do helps the farm to stay in business," Mary said. "Our goal right now is just to make things as efficient as possible with what we have."

Before the feed bunk project was completed in the spring of 2023, the farm filled a 4-yard dumpster every two weeks with the plastic waste from 200-foot feed storage bags their haylage and corn silage were stored in. Haylage and corn silage from their cropland are the primary feed sources for their 240-head dairy herd.

Now, that same dumpster is emptied half as often. The reduced plastic use also comes with cost savings.

"We were spending over \$7,000 a year on plastic bags just to throw them in the dumpster," Elijah said. "Now we're spending \$1,500 on plastic to cover the three concrete bunks."

Additional fuel and labor savings come from cutting the time it takes to feed the cows from two hours to one hour. Mixing the haylage and corn silage is less time-consuming because it's easier to access, and the machinery used to mix the feed doesn't need to run for as long as it did before, saving fuel.

"Unfortunately, our margins have gotten very slim and tight," Elijah said, "So, it's harder and harder for a small family farm to survive. Without modifications and input from other places, we might not be able to stay in business."

The concrete feed storage project was partly made possible by a \$35,000 Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Grant. Mary and Elijah say with the volatility of farming, the new bunk is making the farm more viable and in turn, preserving a piece of Vermont's appeal.

"For Vermont to remain the way it is, we have to invest in agriculture because it creates the landscape that attracts people to Vermont," Elijah said.

- **Grant Award:** \$35,000
- **Applicant Match:** \$65,000
- **Project:** 2 row commodity storage bunk for haylage and corn silage to allow the farm to significantly reduce the use of non-recyclable agriculture plastic offering a more economical, environmentally friendly, and efficient solution to feed storage.

*“We’ve cut our feeding time in half. So, there’s immense fuel savings there. Plus, less waste on garbage because there’s less plastic thrown away.”*





The Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) represents a cross-sector network of partners: Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, Vermont Forests, Parks & Recreation, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, many designated board members from the agriculture and forest sectors, and Ex-Officio members from the Vermont Economic Development Authority, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund.

**Anson Tebbetts**, Secretary of Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (Chair)

**Alyson Eastman**, Deputy Secretary of Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (designee for Anson Tebbetts)

**Danielle Fitzko**, Commissioner of Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation

**Oliver Pierson**, Director of Forests, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (designee for Danielle Fitzko)

**Tayt Brooks**, Deputy Secretary of Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development

**Will Belongia**, Vermont Community Loan Fund, Montpelier - Member who is an agriculture and forestry enterprise funder

**Alan Calfee**, Calfee Woodland Management, Rupert - Member who is a representative of a membership-based forestland owner organization

**Chris Castano**, Maine Hardwoods, Williston - Member who is actively engaged in primary wood processing or logging

**Megan Cowles Camp**, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne - Member who is an employee of a Vermont institution engaged in agriculture or forestry education, training, or research

**Charlie Hancock** (Vice Chair), Northwoods Forestry, Montgomery - Representative of the VT forest industry who is a forester



**Dave Hubbard**, GMC Hardwoods, Norwich - Member who is actively engaged in wood products manufacturing

**Brooke Gladstone**, Newmont Farm, Bradford - Member who is a representative of Vermont's dairy industry who is also a dairy farmer

**Bob Lesnikoski**, Vermont Cranberry Company, East Fairfield - Member who is actively engaged in on-farm value-added processing

**Alison Low**, Northeastern Vermont Development Association – Member with expertise in rural economic development

**Marisa Mauro**, Ploughgate Creamery, Fayston - Member with expertise in sales, marketing, or market development

**Tyler Miller**, Vermont Land Trust, Montpelier - Member with expertise in land planning and conservation efforts that support Vermont's working landscape

**Jon Ramsay**, Center for an Agricultural Economy, Hardwick - Member who is actively engaged in manufacturing or distribution of Vermont agricultural products

**Alisha Utter**, Arbor Farmstead, Grand Isle - Member involved in production agriculture whose primary enterprise is not fluid milk

**Donna Young**, Judd's Wayeeses Farms, Morgan - Member who is actively engaged in commodity maple production

### **Ex-officio, Non-voting Members:**

**Gus Seelig**, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

**Liz Gleason**, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (designee for Gus Seelig)

**Ellen Kahler**, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

**Sarah Isham**, Vermont Economic Development Authority (designee for Cassie Polhemus)



**Elizabeth Sipple**  
Program Manager



**Clare Salerno**  
Program Coordinator



**Diana Ferguson**  
Grants & Contracts Specialist

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Additional staff leadership and support from Abbey Willard, Kristina Sweet, and Laura Ginsburg at the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets and Katharine Servidio at the Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation



## Further Contributors to this Report

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Robbie Blanchard, Graphic Designer

## Thank you to former Working Lands Enterprise Board members who served in 2023

Michael Snyder, Department of Forest, Parks, & Recreation  
Paul Frederick, Department of Forest, Parks, & Recreation  
Randall Szott, Agency of Commerce & Community Development

*Matt Systo and Kim Rich of Old Soul Farm*



# Why is Vermont's Working Lands Enterprise Initiative so important?

“Vermont’s Working Lands Enterprise Initiative isn’t just a program; it’s a commitment to fostering the vitality of our rural communities. By supporting our working lands - farms, forests, and local food businesses - we are not only preserving our state’s unique landscape, but also fostering economic resilience and sustainability. This initiative is a testament to the understanding that the health of our environment and the prosperity of our communities are inextricably linked, and that an investment in our working lands is an investment in the heart and soul of Vermont.”

Danielle Fitzko

*Commissioner of the Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation  
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources*



Stonewood Farm and Tucker Riggs of LSF Forest Products (photo by Erica Houskeeper)



*Giddings Hill Forest Products, Dharauli Goats, and Hyacinthe Ayingeneye and Theogene Mahoro of Mama's Farm*



Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets  
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