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H.941

Introduced by Committee on Agriculture and Forestry

Date:

Subject: Agriculture; agricultural development

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to adopt multiple provisions related to improving the agricultural economy. The bill would require the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (Agency) to evaluate an Agricultural Loan Loss Reserve Fund to serve as credit enhancement for farmers and forest products businesses. The bill would appropriate additional funds to the Working Lands Program. The bill would require the Agency to report to the General Assembly regarding the prioritization and potential funding sources for additional farm and food business service providers needed to support the agricultural industry in Vermont. The bill would require the creation of a directory of legal and financial service providers who provide services or expertise needed by working lands businesses. The bill would appropriate funds for a grant to support the statewide direct market electronic benefit transfer doubling programs.

19 An act relating to the agricultural economy

1 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

2 * * * Working Lands Program * * *

3 Sec. 1. APPROPRIATIONS; WORKING LANDS PROGRAM

4 In fiscal year 2021, in addition to the \$1,300,000.00 otherwise appropriated
5 to the program and pending availability of funding, \$200,000.00 is
6 appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and
7 Markets for grants to be awarded through the Vermont Working Lands
8 program, pursuant to 6 V.S.A. chapter 207, subchapter 2.

9 * * * Agricultural Loan Reserve Fund * * *

10 Sec. 2. AGRICULTURAL LOAN LOSS RESERVE FUND; REPORT

11 The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets, in consultation with the
12 Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, the Vermont Economic Development
13 Authority, and other interested parties, shall evaluate the potential to create an
14 Agricultural Loan Loss Reserve Fund in the State to serve as credit
15 enhancement for farmers and forest products businesses that cannot obtain
16 financing due to lack of collateral or other financing restrictions. On or before
17 January 15, 2021, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall submit
18 to the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and the Senate
19 Committee on Agriculture a proposal for establishing an Agricultural
20 Resources Fund in the State. The proposal shall:

1 (1) identify a financial lender or lenders or other institution that would
2 administer the Fund;

3 (2) recommend criteria for use of the Fund by a lender, including
4 whether the Fund would be available to buy down interest rates on loans or
5 pay, in whole or in part, for defaults on loans and forest products; and

6 (3) estimate the amount funds necessary to capitalize the Fund,
7 including the proposed source of the funds.

8 * * * Farm and Food Business Service Providers * * *

9 Sec. 3. FARM AND FOOD BUSINESS SERVICE PROVIDERS; REPORT

10 On or before November 15, 2020, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and
11 Markets shall submit to the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and
12 the Senate Committee on Agriculture a report regarding the prioritization and
13 potential funding sources for additional farm and food business service
14 providers identified in the 2020 Agriculture Strategic Plan Report as necessary
15 to support the agricultural industry in Vermont. In developing the report, the
16 Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall consult with the Vermont
17 Sustainable Jobs Fund and the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program
18 and shall meet with relevant stakeholders.

1 * * * Directory of Financial Service Providers * * *

2 Sec. 4. CREATION OF DIRECTORY OF LEGAL AND FINANCIAL
3 SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR WORKING LANDS BUSINESSES;
4 APPROPRIATIONS; REPORT

5 (a) On or before January 15, 2021, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Funds, in
6 collaboration with the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program and other
7 relevant stakeholders, shall develop a directory of legal and financial service
8 providers, such as estate and corporate attorneys, accountants, or bookkeepers,
9 who could provide services or expertise needed by working lands businesses in
10 the State. The directory shall include:

11 (1) a listing of qualified legal and financial service providers in the State
12 that have expertise that is relevant to the needs of working lands businesses;
13 and

14 (2) a statement that provides a transparent accounting of how the
15 directory was developed and how relevant legal or financial service providers
16 can be listed in the directory.

17 (b) On or before January 15, 2021, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
18 shall submit to the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and the
19 Senate Committee on Agriculture, a report that:

20 (1) proposes an entity to maintain the directory;

21 (2) estimates the annual cost to operate and update the directory; and

1 (3) summarizes whom the directory will be available to and how it will
2 be accessed and disseminated.

3 (c) In fiscal year 2021, pending availability of funding, \$15,000.00 is
4 appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and
5 Markets for a grant to the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund to assemble the
6 contents of the directory required under subsection (a) of this section.

7 * * * Direct Market EBT * * *

8 Sec. 5. APPROPRIATIONS; NOFA DIRECT MARKET EBT

9 In fiscal year 2021, pending availability of funding, \$43,000.00 is
10 appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and
11 Markets for a grant to the Northeast Organic Farming Association-VT to
12 support the statewide direct market electronic benefit transfer doubling
13 programs.

14 * * * Effective Date * * *

15 Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

16 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2020.