

# Working Landscapes bill holds hope for Vt.

Our heritage is our working landscape. Agriculture and forestry are the backbone of our working landscape. Vermont is a small state and has limited resources. Therefore we need to use them wisely and sustainably. Over the years a number of institutional silos have evolved which have led to a fractured approach to moving agriculture and forestry forward. The Working Lands Enterprise Investment bill encourages a change in that direction and a strategy for doing so.

I applaud the overall intent of this bill. This is an extremely important issue, and I applaud the Legislature for taking the time to address it. As we attempt to refocus our efforts to become more effective, we have to make sure that we don't impede those who have helped build the Vermont image and brand. A number of successful models already exist that can be embraced.

The maple industry is made up of entrepreneurial producers and through their associations has been instrumental in creating Vermont's image. So too has the dairy industry. Examples include Ben and Jerry's, which now is part of Unilever. Another model is AgriMark/Cabot, a dairy and cheese products cooperative that markets its products to consumers and manufacturers regionally, nationally and globally and is solely owned by dairy farmers, many of whom are Vermonters.

Both Ben & Jerry's and Cabot provide hundreds of value-added jobs in the state as well as substantial investments. There are other examples as well. Our own business markets MooDoo and associated compost products throughout the Northeast and provides jobs for 10 in addition to our dairy. There are many other similar businesses in

both agriculture and forestry, from the forest products industry to farm and forest energy development to value added specialty products. We need to encourage our existing businesses to grow as well as develop new ones. Doing so supports rural jobs and provides the economic foundations for the working landscape of Vermont.

One thing that is a challenge and limiting factor to all working landscape business efforts is capital constraints. This is most crucial

in starting and growing a business. This bill provides a framework, specifically the Working Lands Enterprise Fund, for addressing this barrier. The board provides for formal coordination amongst agencies which is a real step forward. As to duties of the board, every effort should be made to use and streamline existing resources and avoid and eliminate duplication and red tape.

Although the bill currently has a bit too much bureaucracy for my taste, the committees are working hard to streamline the process, and I have faith that they will get it right.

We also have to remember that our sustainability is predicated on good stewardship of our resources. One of our most precious resources is our soil. This bill seems to assume this, but in my opinion it should specifically support good stewardship as part of the effort.

Additional funding is crucial to the success of this effort. The state has not adequately funded either the agriculture or forestry sector for years while expecting the agencies to do more. The working landscape is what makes Vermont, Vermont. It's time for the state to step up and ensure that we are investing in our most valuable resource.

## Community Forum

*This week's writer is Robert Foster of Middlebury, a dairy farmer, part-owner and vice president of Foster Brothers Farm, part-owner and president of Vermont Natural Ag Products, and a principal in AgRefresh Inc. (an agricultural ecology consulting firm).*

## Letters to the

### Responsible timber

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation's Commissioner Michael Snyder is right on when he suggests that it is an enormous if not impossible task for county foresters to determine if landowners are complying with the silvicultural guides for timber.

Bill Leak, researcher for the U.S. Forest Service and author of some of the most important guides for managing forests for timber, has stressed that the guides were never intended for the regulatory application for which they have been employed. As currently configured, Current

## Letter

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how she might best cover her travel expenses, she publicly involved her employer in her legal case.

While there are many more aspects about this case that we find troubling, it has been particularly aggravating to read letters that say something like "the state will expunge her record, what right does Middlebury College have to inflict worse punishment?" I have served for several years on review panels for Addison County Court Diversion and in that capacity have met with more than a hundred individuals who are truly grateful to have the opportunity to get a criminal record

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