

# VERMONT HOUSING & CONSERVATION BOARD

## Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

*Advisory Board Meeting*

*Meeting held by phone due to COVID-19*

March 13, 2020

### MINUTES

**Advisory Board members present:** Deputy Secretary Alyson Eastman (chair), Colleen Goodridge, Adam Grinold, Chuck Ross, Gus Seelig, Pete Johnson

**VHCB staff present:** Ela Chapin, Liz Gleason, Mariah Noth, Katie Michels (joined at 2:50PM)

**Guests:** Neil Mickenberg (VHCB Board chair), Abbey Willard (VAAF), Laura Ginsburg (VAAF)

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At 2:33PM, Deputy Sec. Alyson Eastman called the meeting to order.

At 2:36PM, Mariah Noth provided a summary of the 2019 Viability Program Annual Report and new features.

At 2:42PM, Liz Gleason provided updates on the Viability Program's work related to land access and ownership transitions. For the last 3 years a USDA-funded collaborative project of VHCB, the Intervale Center, and Vermont Land Trust has expanded the Viability Program's capacity to provide assistance with land access and related business advising. Navigating land purchase and business transition is complex, and additional challenges arise for beginners trying to access financing in tight markets. Continued partnership across organizations and additional resources will be needed to meet growing need for land access and transition services.

At 2:52PM Liz Gleason provided updates related to forest viability initiatives.

At 2:56PM Katie Michels provided updates on the VT Food Hub Collaborative the Viability Program has been coordinating. In year 3, the Collaborative is developing a transactional network for trading among each other to reach regional markets. The Collaborative's next initiative is creating a shared product catalogue to market regionally and developing shared marketing strategies.

At 3:05PM, Deputy Sec. Eastman provided an update on legislation to improve definitions of "local" that aim to benefit producers.

At 3:07PM, Ela Chapin provided an update on regional work to develop a Northeast alliance of agricultural service providers, called "The Blueprint." She also provided an update on the addendum to the *Exploration of the Future of Vermont Agriculture* report.

At 3:11PM, Ela Chapin shared with the Board that the tenure of former board member, Bob Baird, ended in 2019, opening a seat for an entrepreneur member.

At 3:15PM Abbey Willard provided an update on VAAFMs 2020 Vermont Agriculture & Food System Plan and a collaborative USDA application to launch an Agricultural Innovation Center in VT.

At 3:25PM, Adam Grinold moved, Chuck Ross seconded, and all board members approved a motion to adopt the minutes from the advisory board meeting on June 11, 2019.

At 3:26PM Adam Grinold departed the conference call.

At 3:28PM, Laura Ginsburg of VAAFM provided a summary of three dairy-related initiatives VAAFM is leading: Positive Dairy Messaging Campaign, launching a regional Dairy Innovation Center in Vermont, and publication of two research reports, the Dairy Marketing Assessment (KK&P) and Specialty Cheese Market report (Atlantic Corp.).

At 3:40PM, Deputy Sec. Eastman opened the floor for public comments. No public comments made.

At 3:41PM, other business was discussed, including: rescheduling the joint meeting of the Viability Program Advisory Board and Conservation Issues Committee for June. Topics include the Payment for Ecosystem Services Legislative Working Group report and priorities emerging from the addendum to the *Exploration of the Future of Vermont Agriculture* report.

At 3:44PM, meeting was adjourned.

Minutes submitted by Mariah Noth.