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Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets  
Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation  
Agency of Commerce & Community Development

# **WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

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## **FISCAL YEAR 2020 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

The Working Lands Enterprise Board – a collaborative effort of Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets; Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation; and Agency of Commerce and Community Development – announces the availability of grant funds to support the development of Vermont-based agriculture and forest products businesses.

### **KEY DATES**

**Request for Applications Release: May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Application Opens for Submission: May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

**Application Deadline: May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 at 11:59 PM (application closes at midnight)**

**Award Notification: June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Estimated Project Start: June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

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Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAF) staff are available to provide assistance during State of Vermont business hours, Monday - Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

## I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND FUNDING ELIGIBILITY

### PROGRAM PURPOSE

Approximately 20% of Vermont's working landscape is used for agricultural purposes, and 75% is forested. Vermont prospers and its unique sense of place thrives, in large part, because of intelligent investments in the people and enterprises that comprise its farm, food, and forest-based systems. Strong community engagement and support for the farm and forest sectors leads to enhanced quality of life for Vermont citizens and working lands business owners.

The mission of the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative is to grow the economies, cultures, and communities of Vermont's working landscape. The Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) achieves this by making essential, catalytic investments in critical leverage points of the Vermont farm and forest economy and facilitating policy development to optimize the agricultural and forest use of Vermont lands. [The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, Act 142](#), created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF) and the WLEB. The WLEB is made up of private sector members throughout the supply chains of agriculture and forestry, and staff from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets; Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation; Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development; Vermont Housing & Conservation Board; Vermont Economic Development Authority; and Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund.

### HISTORY OF SUCCESS TO DATE

Since its formation in August 2012, the WLEB has awarded over \$5.5 million in grant funds to 200 grantees, leveraging more than \$10 million in matching funds. For a list of previously funded projects, visit <https://workinglands.vermont.gov/history-initiative/funded-projects>. In April of 2020, the WLEB opted to re-allocate funds from FY20 to address the emerging and urgent needs for Farm, Food & Forest businesses impacted adversely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DETAILS

### AVAILABLE FUNDS

For the Fiscal Year 2020 grant cycle, the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) plans to award a total of \$180,000 in COVID-19 Response Business Development Grants within the sectors of agriculture and forestry. These funds are designed to complement a business's ability to maintain operations while increasing capacity to rebuild and/or recover during an unprecedented time of need.

## SECTION I: PROGRAM OVERVIEW, FUNDING ELIGIBILITY, AND PROJECT CRITERIA

### AWARD RANGE AND MATCH REQUIREMENT

Grants will be awarded within the range of \$5,000 to \$25,000. Match is not a requirement for this particular funding opportunity, though match of cash or in-kind is encouraged, and applications with match will be more competitive.

### PROJECT LENGTH

COVID-19 Response Business Development Grant projects will be 12 months in duration.

### FUNDING SOURCE

Working Lands Enterprise Funds grants are funded through a State of Vermont legislative appropriation, with additional philanthropic contributions.

## ELIGIBILITY

### ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Applying organizations must be agriculture or forestry-based businesses located in Vermont whose registration with the Secretary of State is active at the time of application submission. All business ownership structures are eligible (e.g., Partnerships, Limited Liability Corporations, Sole Proprietorships, Cooperatives, Corporations, S Corporations, L3Cs; and/or non-profits involved in the production of agriculture and/or forest products). Applicants must be in compliance with all state regulations (i.e., water quality, taxes, child support) and in good standing with the State of Vermont at the time of submitting an application and must remain so during the entire grant period.

Previous recipients of Working Lands Business Grants, other than those who have received a grant in Fiscal Year 2020, are eligible to apply for this opportunity.”

### ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Applying organizations must have experienced, and be able to clearly demonstrate, negative business impacts due to COVID-19. Eligible proposals will focus on business response, shifting marketing strategies, or other activities that may improve business recovery. Project activities eligible for funding include:

- **Market development:** developing marketing plans and/or sales strategies, accessing new markets and securing new customers, brand development including website design or upgrades, institutional and wholesale market expansion, costs associated with achieving humane and/or organic certification
- **Value-added production:** transitioning to operation as a new processor or expansion as an existing processor; transitioning to new pack-size/labeling or enhancing production and/or manufacturing efficiencies
- **Research and development:** testing new systems or technologies; developing innovative solutions to production or management issues including accounting, tracking, and/or sales software, (e.g., E-Commerce, Home Delivery or Curbside Pick-up)
- **Operations logistics:** workplace modifications to meet worker safety protocols regulations for working lands enterprises compliance, addressing labor force and public health in response to the pandemic
- **Growth strategy:** new or expansion of current efforts, expanding consumer outreach and/or expansion of existing marketing strategy, established multi-year marketing plan and growth strategy of the industry represented, with intent to sell goods out of Vermont.

## II. GRANT MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

### GRANT AGREEMENT & PAYMENT

Prior to receiving funding, successful applicants must sign a grant agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) indicating their intent to complete the proposed project and authorizing VAAFAM to monitor progress. The grant agreement will include provisions (terms and conditions) set by the State of Vermont as well as any program-specific requirements. Review [Attachment C - Standard State Provisions for Contracts and Grants](#) (revised 12/15/2017) at [bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms](https://bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms) for the most recent State of Vermont grant provisions.

Prior to commencement of work and release of any payments, grantees must submit:

- A current [IRS Form W-9](#) (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification), signed within the past six months (not required if organization is a previous State of Vermont grant recipient)
- A certificate of insurance consistent with the requirements set forth in [Attachment C](#) of the grant agreement (not required if grantee already has a current certificate of insurance on file with VAAFAM)
- A completed [Act 154 Good Standing Certification](#) – find this form at [finance.vermont.gov/vendors-and-grantees](https://finance.vermont.gov/vendors-and-grantees)
- Documentation that verifies pledged matching funds, as applicable.

### GRANTEE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Working Lands Business Grant payments are made on a reimbursement basis, after costs have been incurred, and require documentation of project expenditures (e.g., receipts, paid invoices) to substantiate the total dollar amount of each claim for payment. After grant agreements are fully executed, i.e., have been approved and signed by all parties, grant funds will be disbursed according to the following schedule (subject to change, with manager approval, based on project needs):

- Up to 60% of the grant award following receipt and approval of an initial claim for payment via WebGrants containing documentation of expenditures to date for which reimbursement is requested
- Up to an additional 20% of the grant award (80% total) at the mid-point of the project, pending completion and approval of the Interim Report and a second claim containing documentation of project expenditures to date, including any matching expenses
- Final 20% (or other remaining amount) of the grant award, pending receipt and approval of the Final Report demonstrating completion of project deliverables and satisfactory achievement of measurable project outcomes, and a final claim, including documentation of project expenses, including matching funds.

## **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

Prior to receipt of the second and third grant payments, respectively, grant recipients must complete Interim and Final status reports in WebGrants. Reports will include a narrative of project accomplishments to date, progress on meeting expected goals and outcomes, and high-resolution digital photos in .jpg format that demonstrate project work. Grantees must also complete an Annual Survey one year following and two years following the grant end date. Grantees will be expected to collaborate with VAAF staff to measure the impact of their project on their business or organization to promote optimal stewardship of state-awarded funds.

Grantees must be willing to share project details, including successes and challenges, with the public, the WLEB, and the media, which illustrate how the grant is impacting Vermont’s working lands economies. This may occur through media inquiries, press events on location, and/or site visits from VAAF staff, WLEB members, and/or their stakeholder partners.

## **III. APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT**

### **HOW TO APPLY**

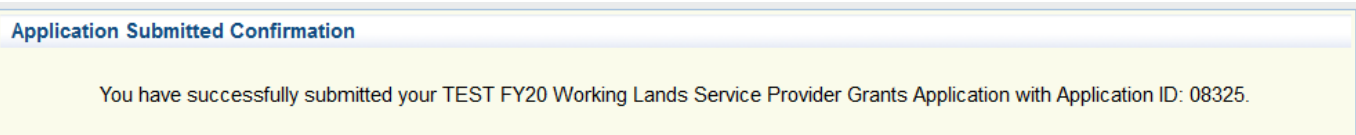
Applications will be accepted only through the online grants management system, WebGrants, at [agriculturegrants.vermont.gov](http://agriculturegrants.vermont.gov). Paper applications will not be accepted. **Note:** If you or your organization have previously registered in WebGrants, please do not create another account.

Applications may be started in WebGrants at any time beginning on **Friday, May 21st<sup>th</sup>** and may remain in editing mode until submission no later than **Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup> at 11:59 PM**. After this time, WebGrants will prevent applications from being submitted. Late applications will not be accepted.

For technical instructions on submitting an application, please see the guide on the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets website at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/howtoapply>.

Upon reaching the “Funding Opportunities” page, select the link for Working Lands COVID-19 Response Business Development Grants, then start an application. Please edit and save your original application until completion; do not create a duplicate application.

After successfully submitting your application, you will see an **Application Submitted Confirmation** screen with an Application ID number. (See example below.)



Applicants will be contacted by email in **June 2020** regarding the acceptance or denial of their application based on review and scoring criteria (see Section IV: Application Review and Scoring).

## SECTION III: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets staff are available to provide assistance during State of Vermont business hours, Monday - Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Please read the complete application guide at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/howtoapply> before requesting support. Please plan ahead, as assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

#### A. Applicant Information

- Organization name
- Type of legal entity (e.g. sole proprietorship, LLC, cooperative, 501(c)(3), etc.)
- Contact name
- Title
- Phone number
- Email
- Physical address
- County
- Primary product category
- Secondary product category
- Demonstration of applicant compliance with state regulations and good standing with the State of Vermont – e-signature and date
- How did you learn about this grant opportunity?
- Interest in receiving Working Lands related e-news/events/funding opportunity updates by email (Yes/No)
- Willingness to share contact information with other state and federal funders (Yes/No)

#### B. Project Information

- Project title
- Project Description
- Working Lands funds requested (\$)
- If you currently have a business plan, please upload here.
  - Business plan completion date

*\*Please note: Exclusion of your business plan (including current income statement, balance sheet, and projected income/expenses for the next 1-3 years) will lessen the competitiveness of your application.*

  - Have you applied for and/or received other grants for COVID-19 response?
  - Please list grants applied for and/or received
- Are you a previous Working Lands Grantee?
  - If so: In what year? What was the grant amount?

- #### C. Project Summary (2000 character limit):
- Provide an overview of your project, including how requested and matching funds would be used. Explain how your business has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and how your project will support your business during recovery. If collaboration is intended, please include information on how other enterprises will be involved with the project.

**SECTION III: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT**

- D. Business Description** (1500 character limit): Describe your business in terms of size (gross sales, number of employees, production volume), markets, and number of years in business.
- E. Financial Need** (1500 character limit): Please provide an explanation of why Working Lands Business Grant funds are needed, and how the project would or would not move forward without these funds.
- F. Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes**

Complete the matrix identifying the goals and expected outcomes of the project (a minimum of three, and not more than five). Each goal must have a corresponding specific, measurable outcome anticipated due to project work. Outcomes must be discrete and attainable within the 12-month grant period (ending in approximately June 2021). Applicants should include one of the Working Lands Results-based Accountability outcomes (increased income, jobs, product output, and/or acres in active use). Competitive applicants will address multiple Working Lands outcomes Other goals and outcomes may relate to sales, new markets accessed, or other business/project topics, as applicable.

Goals	Expected Outcome

**Example Goal :** Enhance business web presence to support additional regional sales  
**Example Outcome:** Upgrade business website and add e-commerce feature by July 1, 2020; train staff on new website management by July 5, 2020  
**Example Goal:** Increase volume of cutting boards to markets outside of Vermont  
**Example Outcome:** Increase sales revenues of cutting boards to ME and NH by 25%, by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020  
**Note:** All outcomes must be quantitative and measurable. For further examples, please refer to the following document: <https://workinglands.vermont.gov/business-toolkit-resources/writing-goals-performance-measures-and-outcomes>

- G. Impact** (1800 character limit): Describe specific measurable performance outcomes, which may include: increased sales, increased net income, jobs created or retained, increased product output, and new markets accessed. If applicable, please reference other working lands business who will be involved and how they will benefit. (2000 characters max)
  - Will the project increase gross sales for your business? If so, how much are gross sales anticipated to increase (in aggregate dollars)?
  - What is current annual product output (number of units produced)? What units are

## SECTION III: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

- utilized for product output?
- Will the project increase product output?
- Will this project increase labor in the business?
  - If so, how many FullTime Equivalent (FTE) jobs are anticipated to be created?
- What are the current total acres in production?

Will the total number of acres utilized by the business increase, decrease or remain the same as a result of this project? How many new acres will be used/lost? **Letters of commitment or support are not required for this particular funding opportunity, though if submitted, will be more competitive.** Letters of commitment and support from suppliers, or buyers that describe capability to deliver the additional units project will utilize, can be uploaded into the “Attachments” section of the Budget & Narrative\_application form, within WebGrants.

**Letters of commitment** demonstrate the project partners’ involvement and identify the specific contributions they will make to ensure the project’s success. Content could include:

- A brief description of previous collaborations with the applicant; the role the partner/stakeholder will play in the proposed project; financial support they will contribute (if applicable); and the type and value of any in-kind support they will provide – labor, facility space, equipment.

**Letters of support** articulate general support for the grant request. Support letters describe involvement with business/organization and/or the community as well as explain how the funding will help address a need or solve a problem. Content could include:

- A brief description of services or individuals that benefited from applicants work, and genuine interest in how the funding will benefit the community.

**H. Budget and Narrative:** Provide a detailed budget, including Working Lands Grant funds requested and other funding sources supporting the project as matching funds. Costs incurred prior to the signing of the grant agreement are not eligible.

**Matching funds are not required for this round, however, applications that do provide matching dollars will be more competitive.** Match sources must be identified by the time of application submission and in place by the time of grant agreement execution (estimated June 2020).

- Examples of **cash match** include funds in the bank, third party funds, and applicant labor directly associated with the proposed project
- Examples of **in-kind match** include goods or services provided during the grant period for which no expenditure is made (e.g. contractors, consultants, or equipment provided pro bono for the project, volunteer labor, and/or donated supplies that are not part of the normal cost of doing business)



**SECTION III: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT**

- **Indirect costs** (i.e. facilities/administrative costs) are allowed for up to 10% of requested Working Lands Grant funds. Additional indirect costs may be used as match.

**Budget Template:** Enter each line item of your budget into the appropriate field, along with a brief explanation of anticipated costs in each category.

Expense Category	Working Lands Request	Applicant Contribution		Match Source	Details/Purpose	Total
		Cash	In-Kind			
Salaries/Wages (Personnel)						
Advertising						
Design/Marketing Services						
Supplies/Printing						
Contractual						
Other Direct Costs						
Indirect Costs						
TOTAL						

**Budget Narrative** (1000 character limit for each question):

- Describe how Working Lands Business Grant funds will be used to support your project.
- Please provide the source(s) for all matching funds and your timeline or plan for securing these commitments.

## IV. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING

### APPLICATION REVIEW

Working Lands COVID-19 Response Business Development Grant funds will be awarded to projects benefitting agriculture and forest-based businesses through a competitive review process. A committee of Working Lands Enterprise Board members, state agency staff, and industry stakeholders will review submitted applications and make funding recommendations to the full Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB). The WLEB will make final decisions for official approval of awarded projects. Applicants will be notified by email of application approval or denial by the end of June 2020. Feedback to unsuccessful applicants will be provided upon request.

### APPLICATION SCORING

Criteria that will inform scoring of application quality are as follows:

**Quality of Proposal:** The proposal is comprehensible and clear, and the proposed project fits within the eligibility criteria outlined in the Request for Applications.

**Innovation:** The proposed project suggests there will be new ideas or marketing business models deployed which may include but are not limited to showing a new solution to an old problem, creating a new product or crop, commercializing a researched product or process.

**Financial Need:** The applicant demonstrates a clear need for Working Lands Enterprise Funds.

**Outcomes/Impact:** The applicant demonstrates how the business will enhance Vermont's working landscape, with performance outcomes that may include job creation and retention; increased sales to new markets outside of Vermont; increased product output; increased and/or retained acres in active forestry or agricultural use.

**Budget:** Applicant has prepared a clear budget reflecting realistic, well-planned components, including required matching funds. Budget narrative supports and further details items in budget table.

### RELATED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES

VAAFAM offers a range of [funding opportunities](#) for agriculture-related organizations, which can be found at [agriculture.vermont.gov/grants](http://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants). In addition, [business planning and assistance](#) resources available to the Vermont agricultural community can be found at [agriculture.vermont.gov/businessdevelopment/planning](http://agriculture.vermont.gov/businessdevelopment/planning)

# APPENDIX A: PROGRAM PROVISIONS

**Working Lands Grant** agreements are held between the State of Vermont and the business or, where applicable, the business entity. Should the business entity cease to exist, or if the business entity to which this grant is issued becomes inactive, the State may suspend or cancel this Grant immediately, and the State shall be under no obligation to pay or further pay grantee.

**Ready to begin work:** Grantee must be ready to begin project work immediately following execution of this grant agreement. If grantee anticipates a delay or experiences a delay of more than two months, grantee shall submit to the grant manager via email an explanation for the delay and note the extent to which the delay will/will not impact project completion. Similarly, grantees should submit their initial claim for funds reimbursement within two months of receipt of the grant agreement. An explanation must be sent to the grant administrator if no request for reimbursement is anticipated within the first two months of the grant.

**Publicly known and open to inspection:** Except for grantee proprietary and personal identifying data, as noted per 1 V.S.A. § 317(c), grantee names, projects, the amount of grant awards, and all other information regarding Working Lands grant projects are considered public information and are open to inspection. Grantee can also anticipate communication from other Working Lands partners and stakeholders regarding project successes and accomplishments.

**Grantee Confidential and/or Proprietary Information:** Grantee is responsible for noting all information, data, project results and narrative text which it considers confidential and/or proprietary in its reports and communications with the state. Grantee financials are automatically classified as confidential by the state.

Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, as a public instrumentality, is subject to the Vermont Public Records Law, 1 VSA § 315 - 320. The statute contains specific exemptions for tax-related information of persons, financial information of an individual or business, and trade secrets. This information will be held in confidential files by the Working Lands Enterprise Board and will not be available for public inspection under the Public Records Law.

The Working Lands Enterprise Board and the state of Vermont consider the following information about applicants to be subject to public record: contact information of applicants; names, description, and contact information of applying enterprise or organization; the purpose and amount of any Working Lands Enterprise Funds received; and grantee communications. Other information may be shared in aggregate form (without identifying individual business info).

**Acknowledgement:** All meetings and gatherings held as a result of this grant will recognize the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets and the Working Land Enterprise Board as a funder. Written and electronic materials produced shall include text acknowledging the same and shall also feature a Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets graphic. Grantee may be required to reprint event flyers, posters, and/or brochures or repost meeting announcements if the State learns of grantee's failure to acknowledge the Working Lands Enterprise Board as a funder.

**Tax Implications:** We recommend that all entities consult with a tax accountant as needed regarding how to report grant awards for tax purposes, including advising on your tax return. State of Vermont staff and Working Lands partners are not authorized to advise or provide input on tax-related information, including the completion of federal forms