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H.368

Introduced by Representatives Surprenant of Barnard, Cole of Hartford,  
Leavitt of Grand Isle, Boyden of Cambridge, Cina of  
Burlington, Hooper of Randolph, Logan of Burlington,  
Mrowicki of Putney, Mulvaney-Stanak of Burlington, Pajala of  
Londonderry, Rice of Dorset, Sims of Craftsbury, Small of  
Winooski, Templeman of Brownington, White of Bethel, and  
Whitman of Bennington

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Agriculture; economic development; new farmers; veteran farmers;  
farmers who are disadvantaged

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to amend the  
powers and duties of the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board to require  
the Board to provide financial and technical assistance for new farmers,  
veteran farmers, and disadvantaged farmers in order to increase opportunities  
for more persons to enter farming in the State.

An act relating to supporting new farmers, veteran farmers, and farmers  
who are disadvantaged

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

2 Sec. 1. 6 V.S.A. § 4607 is amended to read:

3 § 4607. POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE VERMONT WORKING LANDS

4 ENTERPRISE BOARD

5 (a) Duties. The Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board is charged with:

6 (1) optimizing the agricultural and forest use of Vermont lands and other  
7 agricultural resources;

8 (2) expanding existing markets and identifying and developing new  
9 profitable in-state and out-of-state markets for food, fiber, forest products, and  
10 value-added agricultural products, including farm-derived renewable energy;

11 ~~and~~

12 (3) identifying opportunities and challenges related to access to capital,  
13 infrastructure, product development, marketing, training, research, and  
14 education; and

15 (4) increasing financial and technical assistance for new farmers,  
16 veteran farmers, and disadvantaged farmers in order to expand opportunities  
17 for more persons to enter farming in the State.

18 (b) Powers. The Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board shall have the  
19 authority:

1           (1) to design and conduct an ongoing public engagement process, which  
2           may include taking testimony and receiving information from any party  
3           interested in the Board's activities;

4           (2) to gain information through the use of experts, consultants, and data  
5           to perform analysis as needed;

6           (3) to request services from State economists, State administrative  
7           agencies, and State programs;

8           (4) to obtain information from other planning entities, including the  
9           Farm to Plate Investment Program;

10          (5) to serve as a resource for and make recommendations to the  
11          Administration and the General Assembly on ways to improve Vermont's  
12          laws, rules, and policies in order to attain the goals set forth in section 4604 of  
13          this title;

14          (6) to establish an application process, eligibility criteria, and criteria for  
15          prioritizing assistance for awarding grants, loans, incentives, and other  
16          investments in agricultural and forestry enterprises and in food and forest  
17          systems;

18          (7) to award grants and other investments, which may include loans  
19          underwritten and administered through the Vermont Economic Development  
20          Authority;

1           (8) to enter into performance contracts with one or more persons in  
2 order to provide investment and services to agricultural and forestry  
3 enterprises, including:

4           (A) technical assistance and product research services;

5           (B) marketing assistance, market development, and business and  
6 financial planning;

7           (C) organizational, regulatory, and development assistance; and

8           (D) feasibility studies of facilities or capital investments to optimize  
9 construction and other cost efficiencies;

10          (9) to identify workforce needs and programs in order to develop  
11 training and incentive opportunities for the agriculture and forest product  
12 sectors after consulting with the Department of Labor;

13          (10) to identify strategic statewide infrastructure and investment  
14 priorities considering:

15           (A) leveraging opportunities;

16           (B) economic clusters;

17           (C) return-on-investment analysis;

18           (D) other considerations the Board determines appropriate;

19          (11) to develop an annual operating budget, and:

20           (A) solicit and accept any grants, gifts, or appropriations necessary to  
21 implement the budget pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 5; and

1 (B) expend any monies necessary to carry out the purposes of this  
2 section; ~~and~~

3 (12) to identify growing markets and opportunities for the livestock and  
4 poultry sectors, including promoting independent animal welfare certification  
5 programs; and

6 (13) to encourage and assist new farmers, veteran farmers, and farmers  
7 who are disadvantaged in the ownership and operation of farms in the State.

8 (c) Staff support. The Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall  
9 provide administrative support to the extent authorized by the Secretary of  
10 Agriculture, Food and Markets, and with the assistance of the Department of  
11 Forests, Parks and Recreation to the extent authorized by the Commissioner of  
12 Forests, Parks and Recreation, in order to support the Board in the performance  
13 of its duties pursuant to this section.

14 (d) As used in this section:

15 (1) "Farmer who is disadvantaged" means a person engaged in farming  
16 or proposing to engage in farming who is annually earning not more than the  
17 State median income level for the relevant household size.

18 (2) "New farmer" means a person who has not previously operated a  
19 farm in Vermont for more than three years in the previous 10 calendar years.

20 (3) "Veteran farmer" means a person who served in the U.S. Army,  
21 Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve

1 components thereof; who was discharged or released under conditions other  
2 than dishonorable; and who has not previously operated a farm for more than  
3 three years in the previous 10 calendar years.

4 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

5 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2023.