

H.765

An act relating to establishing the Vermont agricultural innovation authority

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

Sec. 1. 6 V.S.A. chapter 161A is added to read:

CHAPTER 161A. VERMONT AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION

AUTHORITY

§ 2957. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

(1) "Authority" means the Vermont agricultural innovation authority.

(2) "Value-added agricultural product" means any agricultural commodity or product that has been changed, produced, or segregated such that the market for the product has expanded and where the greater portion of the revenue derived from the value-added activity accrues to the producer of the commodity or product.

§ 2958. ESTABLISHMENT OF VERMONT AGRICULTURAL

INNOVATION AUTHORITY

(a) The Vermont agricultural innovation authority is hereby created and established as a body corporate and politic and a public instrumentality of the state.

(b) The Vermont agricultural innovation authority shall have a board of directors of 11 members selected as follows:

(1) The secretary of agriculture, food and markets, who shall serve as chair of the board of directors; and

(2) The following 10 members appointed by the governor:

(A) One representative from each of the two largest membership-based agricultural organizations in Vermont;

(B) One member from a group representing the Vermont dairy industry;

(C) One member from a group representing the Vermont maple industry;

(D) One member from a group representing the Vermont livestock industry;

(E) One member from a group representing the Vermont produce industry;

(F) Four individuals with knowledge of or experience in the production or marketing of value-added agricultural products.

(c) The Vermont agricultural innovation authority's powers are vested in the board of directors, and a quorum shall consist of six members. The board of directors shall adopt bylaws for its operation. No action of the authority shall be considered valid unless the action is supported by a majority vote of the members present and voting and then only if at least six members vote in favor of the action.

(d) Members of the board shall be appointed for staggered terms of three years. Any vacancy occurring among the members of the board shall be filled by the governor for the unexpired portion of the term. A member may be reappointed, but no member, except the secretary of agriculture, food and markets, may serve for more than six consecutive years.

(e) Board members who are not state employees or whose membership is not supported by their employer or association may receive per diem and reimbursement for travel as provided in 32 V.S.A. § 1010 to the extent that funds are available.

§ 2959. PURPOSE; POWERS AND DUTIES

(a) To achieve the purposes of this chapter, the Vermont agricultural innovation authority shall:

(1) Promote agriculture in Vermont, including the production or marketing of value-added agricultural products;

(2) Coordinate with federal and state agencies and private sources to make financial resources available to the authority for distribution of financial assistance for the promotion of agriculture, including the production or marketing of value-added agricultural products.

(3) Distribute federal grant monies for the production or marketing of value-added agricultural products. Grant monies distributed under this subdivision may be used for:

(A) Technical assistance, including technical, engineering, and product research services;

(B) Assistance in marketing, market development, and business planning, including advisory services with respect to leveraging capital assets;

(C) Organizational, outreach, and development assistance to increase the viability, growth, and sustainability of businesses engaged in the production or marketing of value-added agricultural products;

(D) Studies that analyze the feasibility of facilities, including processing facilities, for use by potential producers or marketers of value-added products in order to determine the size that optimizes construction and other cost efficiencies.

(b) The agricultural innovation authority shall have all the power necessary and convenient to carry out the purposes of this chapter, including:

(1) To consult, contract, or partner with the Vermont economic development authority to provide financial assistance for purposes authorized by this chapter;

(2) To support the establishment of public-private partnerships for the promotion and development of agriculture in the state, including the production or marketing of value-added agricultural products.

(3) To support local initiatives to produce or market value-added agricultural products.

(4) To provide resources, financial assistance, and financial incentives to local, regional, public, and private entities in the form of loans or grants for the production or marketing of value-added agricultural products.

(5) To pursue and coordinate access to regional and local revolving loan funding and all state, federal, and private funding that is available for the development of agriculture and value-added agricultural products.

(6) To receive and accept grants, gifts, loans, or contributions from any source subject to the provisions of 32 V.S.A. § 5.

(7) To use the services and staff of the agency of agriculture, food and markets to assist in the performance of its duties with the concurrence of the secretary of agriculture, food and markets.

(8) To contract for support, technical, or other professional services.

§ 2960. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

Other departments and agencies of state government shall assist and cooperate with the authority and shall make available to it information and data as needed to assist the authority in carrying out its duties. Nothing in this section shall be construed to waive any privilege or protection otherwise afforded to the data and information under exemptions to the public records act or under other laws due solely to the fact that the information or data are shared with the authority pursuant to this section.

Sec. 2. REPEAL

6 V.S.A. §§ 2961 (creation of agricultural development commission) and  
2962 (agricultural development commission duties) are repealed.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect upon passage.