

Agriculture Recovery Task Force

Meeting #1

Tuesday August 8th, 2023

10:00am – 11:00am EST

The Agriculture Recovery Task Force will coordinate recovery efforts for Vermont's agriculture and food system in response to the 2023 severe weather and flooding disasters. The task force will coordinate with Vermont Emergency Management and the State Emergency Operations Center.

Charge:

- Identify key priorities through community engagement and subject matter experts.
- Coordinate implementation strategy proposals that support Vermont farmers in recovering lost revenue and assets.
- Communicate critical needs of Vermont's food system to State and Federal policy makers.

Co- Chair – Nicole Dubuque – Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

Co-Chair – Roy Beckford – University of Vermont Extension

Agenda:

10:00am – 10:15am – Introductions

10:15am – 10:20am – Review charge/purpose

10:20am – 10:50am – Identify Key Priorities

10:50am – 11:00am – Next Steps

Meeting Notes:

- Ben Rose (Vermont Department of Public Safety)– Explained his role with the SEOC and recovery efforts. Ben will be the point of contact to communicate key priorities to Cabinet level.
- Secretary Tebbetts (Vermont Agency of Agriculture) highlighted several content areas for the task force to discuss:
 - ✓ Large income losses (mostly in produce) where cash flow problems now exist.
 - ✓ Feed loss, corn and standing hay under water, tremendous amount of hay that has not yet been harvested. Quality issues. VAAFM is working on a platform for farmers to advertise when they have extra feed available for those in need.
 - ✓ How are we going to make sure we have enough livestock feed for the fall, winter, etc.?
 - ✓ Infrastructure needs – farmers have lost tools, tractors, etc.
 - ✓ Many farmers have reported not having USDA insurance – in need of recommendations for making insurance programs better.
 - ✓ Waiting on disaster declaration from USDA – once it is approved, we need to identify and communicate to the public what is happening with programs.
 - ✓ Private donations are available for distribution in the form of grants.
- John Roberts (Farm Service Agency - FSA) updates:
 - ✓ Linked with 2-1-1 to make sure they are up to date on all reports.
 - ✓ They are working on disaster declaration – 354 farms reported loss as of 8/8/23. John believes that there is sufficient evidence for a disaster declaration. Unsure about timeline for the declaration. Suspects the secretary will be quick with turnaround. A lot of producers are not insured the way FSA/USDA would like them to be.

- Questions to consider: What is wrong with the programs? What needs to be adjusted?
- ✓ Approached by a lot of new farmers that have not worked with FSA before. Many have found that they actually have insurance if they filled out the 860 form after the May 2023 freeze event.
- ✓ FSA is seeking waivers for field inspections.
- ✓ John asked that the task force encourage farmers to take photos of their damage.
- ✓ [USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Vermont Farmers and Livestock Producers Impacted by Floods](#)
- Travis Thomason (USDA) – Explained that his office will provide support and technical assistance to FSA's programs. EQIP disaster assistance - pool of funds that can be rolled out at any point and quickly. Announcement expected the week of 8/8. \$4M in funding to assist with vegetative practices. Early start waivers can be provided. Start writing contracts. All funds must be obligated by 9/30/23.
- Sarah Warning – (Rural development/USDA).
 - ✓ Attached – Press Release on Home Repair Grants – now a lot larger, and no age restriction. Reminder – **these are income eligible – folks have to be Very Low Income in their county.** As Jill asked about, these come after FEMA and any homeowner insurance.
 - ✓ RD also have payment plan options for all current borrowers. Because Montpelier State Office closed (unknown return date!), HOUSING inquiries should be redirected to these contacts: **(603) 223-6035 (including Vermonters) or write to HousingVT.NH@usda.gov.**
 - ✓ Update on USDA Rural Development programs: **RECOVERY:**
 - As mentioned, RD may also have PUBLIC ASSISTANCE funding that our eligible entities can apply to RD for, but that will come following a Congressional allocation.
 - Here are two examples of funding that is NOW available for the FY 22 December Disaster that was declared. Reminder – these entities still have to **prove that the damage/impact related to the specific Disaster.**
 - [Wastewater Grants for Vermont December Disaster](#)
 - [Community Facilities Grants for Vermont December Disaster](#)
- Grace Oedel (Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont - NOFA VT)
 - ✓ Scale of response money to need is not in line.
 - ✓ NOFA has their own intake form for farms seeking assistance – most lost hundreds of thousands of dollars.
 - ✓ NOFA VT is helping with FSA forms and reporting to 2-1-1.
 - ✓ Hearing that folks are just holding on. Need to increase every pool we have including state pool 1M is not enough. Making NAP retroactive (John already requested).
 - ✓ NOFA VT has given out 70 grants at \$5,000 each and will go up to 150. Would ultimately like to give \$10,000 and are working on increasing philanthropic efforts.
 - ✓ Ongoing rain – what kind of emergency does this fall into? How do we document and convey the ongoing issues. Unsure how to document. It is wet and nothing will grow. How to prepare for more erratic weather.
 - ✓ Having flood waters on your farm doesn't immediately raise organic certification issue. Be in touch with your organic certification agent if concerned with what has happened on your farms.
 - ✓ Many people have replanted and are waiting on soil testing and planning remediation.

- ✓ Emergency grants for people to actively secure feed. Seen price gouging and are working on technical assistance as well.
- ✓ Anticipating second wave of emergency when there is not enough feed later in the season. Mitigation techniques.
- Liz Gleason (Vermont Housing Conservation Board - VHCB)
 - ✓ Farmers are very leveraged at this point in the year with lack of cash.
 - ✓ What is the long term solution? More disasters coming, how do we do it better next time and record best practices?
- Drew Watson (Agency of Agriculture) - reviewed loss survey results as of 8/8/23. This dashboard (linked below) auto-updates survey results every morning at 8am.
<https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiNTc2MzcxYWUtYzUwNC00MDE2LThkMWYtMjA3MWMyODNjOWE5liwidCI6IjIwYjQ5MzNiLWJhYWQtNDMzYy05YzAyLTcwZWVjYzc1NTIjNiJ9>