



ROLE OF VERMONT STATE AGENCIES

Desired Role of the State of Vermont

Get out of our way and let us operate. Sometimes the state regulations and permitting are a pain... I would rather they don't spend more money. I prefer they streamline the regulatory process and reduce the regulatory burden. (Producer)

We need a holistic analysis of the regulatory requirements and obstacles. It gets layered on piecemeal, and you have an ad-hoc approach. We have to regulate water quality. We have to regulate food safety. We have to regulate labor. Besides conflicting requirements and redundancies, it is messy. I don't think anyone has stepped back and looked at the whole thing. For example, you are growing on 5 acres and selling at CSAs, but some day you want to have 50 acres with wholesaling, light processing and supplying to big markets.... What are the things you have to deal with? Put together a coherent package, include the steps and streamline it. (Third Party)

- Focus on improving the business environment for producers so they can grow successfully
 - Address regulatory barriers – especially water and labor
 - Find ways to drive down cost of doing business
 - Group purchasing
 - Encourage food hubs and help them thrive
 - Boost distribution channels
 - Attract an employable workforce
 - Focus on tourism efforts

- Want different state agencies to work together to address combination of challenges and gaps
 - Address systems and approaches that work in silos and at odds with each other
 - Streamline complex processes

Marketing Supports

- Provide scholarships and grants to producers
 - Attend trade shows
 - Visit buyers, provide in-store samples
 - Take part in education and technical assistance workshops and courses
 - Incentivize growers to develop four-season offerings and year-round sales
 - Access low-cost financing options to seed next-level growth

- Help build connections and networks
 - Hold events so buyers can meet producers
 - Cultivate relationships with distributors
 - Encourage more formalized, professional mentoring programs that tap into a broader range of expertise
 - For business owners and their leadership (e.g., Vistage)
 - Financial/capital mentors (e.g., Mondragon Cooperative in Vermont)

The State could help people gain valuable knowledge. There are excellent resources out there, but they aren't cheap. (Producer)

There are a lot of unknowns for a company – how to work the national scene. The retailer and broker, you don't know what makes them tick, how people along the system and chain work and what they need... You also need to understand all potential distributors. It would be great to have a list and understand why you would work with one versus another – regional, national, specialized. You need exposure to what is out there, because you just don't know. (Producer)

The Mondragon Cooperative deals with the financial banking system. They provide shared capital and shared learning. There are the banks; lending and private equity is available. Very hands-on expertise.... They can share a lot and there is coaching available. (Producer)

Education and Technical Assistance Areas

- ◆ Better business skills
 - ◆ Business planning, financial planning, long-term planning
 - ◆ Management skills
 - ◆ How to negotiate deals

- ◆ Export readiness
 - ◆ Understanding the buyer, buying culture and requirements
 - ◆ Understand the middle man and how they get compensated
 - ◆ Learn their language
 - ◆ Prepare sell sheets and pricing structures
 - ◆ Guidance on state regulations
 - ◆ Bar-codes on packaging
 - ◆ Know how to build relationships
 - ◆ Proper food safety

Marketing Supports

- Many recognize that the State of Vermont does not have the resources to invest in large-scale marketing and advertising campaigns
 - Can't compete with marketing budgets of bigger states
 - Believe that it is the responsibility of producers, distributors, buyers and third-party associations to market their products and brands well

- Ensure marketing efforts are impactful
 - Provide a strategic framework
 - Make messaging tool kit available
 - Access to online tools and resources
 - Tap into other web, social media, promotional experts
 - Help producers visually tell their stories – short videos
 - Vendor search capabilities for buyers

- Note: the time is ripe for the cider industry to move to the next level of growth
 - Desire for help to generate more consumer demand

We need key messaging that we can all use in a tool kit. It is not realistic or desirable for the government to market for us. But we can't organize ourselves on an overall message done well strategically for the next ten years.
(Third Party)

It is crucial to have more video online. Consumers will be engaging more and more in video content. [Suppliers] need to be able to tell their authentic story and connect at an emotional level in one to two-minutes on Facebook and YouTube. (Distributor)

Right now and for the next three to five years is the time to make a push for a top-quality place for cider that could have a lasting effect. ... We need to get to the consumer... have tasting event at stores and restaurants.. holding a trade event in New York City or Chicago... and give away a \$500 bottle or have some other cool reason to come.
(Third Party)

Partnerships are Vital

- ◆ Some awareness among the participant pool about available partners
 - For the majority, it was harder to recall specific programs and partners
 - Make general mentions
 - Need to work with local universities and cooperative extensions
 - Specifically mentioned: Working Lands Enterprise Board, UVM Cooperative Extension, NOFA, Vermont Fresh Network, Shelburne Farms, Small Business Association, Sustainable Jobs Fund
- ◆ Opportunity to coordinate, build and promote
 - More like-minded alliances
 - Better partnerships with distributors
 - Wealth of resources available
- ◆ Want to see more regional marketing efforts (especially big buyers)
 - Not so tied to local
 - Working with other state agencies to promote New England
 - Encourage greater collaboration between producers from different states
 - Cross partnerships create value

*We have a partnership with Vermont Farmstead and Shipyard Pumpkin Head in Maine. It is a business collaboration to create a pumpkin-based cheese ale. It is exclusive for our store.....
(Buyer)*