

For Immediate Release

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Revitalizing Vermont's Rural Economy

Campaign launched by the Vermont Working Landscape Partnership today

JERICHO— Today, members representing the Vermont Working Landscape Partnership (VWLP) launched the *Revitalizing Vermont's Rural Economy* campaign. The campaign is focused on achieving the five goals outlined in the Partnership's Action Plan, *Investing in Our Farm and Forest Future*.

The Partners gathered at Jericho Settlers Farm, where they were welcomed by Christa Alexander. Alexander noted that the farm supports the productive use of over 200 acres and provides income for 3 families, while providing high quality food for the local community. Alexander said, "The most exciting part of the Action Plan for me is the Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Development Fund to pull together all the various efforts to invest in Vermont agriculture and forest enterprises and aggressively support the many entrepreneurs who want to build businesses here in Vermont."

Peter Condaxis of Ryegate Associates agreed, stating, "Our state is blessed with productive lands – we have natural resources; now is the time to look to new ways to invest in our farm and forest future. The Action Plan defines a course of action to make this happen, utilizing financial investment, technical assistance, and particularly important to forest landowners, a "working lands" designation that will promote sustainable forest management."

Marie Audet of Blue Spruce Farm encouraged her fellow farmers, saying, "Here I am today a dairy farmer, and I'm feeling optimistic. We are not in this alone. Our farms are vital to our communities, and we are an integral part of our State's charm. Let's embrace this Action Plan and let's be creative to support our working lands."

Condaxis summed up the Action Plan by saying, "If we, as Vermont citizens, value our rural landscape as we say we do, then we have to step up and invest in the future of that landscape by keeping it active, keeping it productive, keeping it working."

Paul Costello, executive director of Vermont Council on Rural Development, noted that the Action Plan represents a jobs strategy that builds from Vermont's brand identity and our fundamental values. He noted, "All Vermonters benefit from the working landscape, and we should all contribute to keeping it strong. What we present today is not just a vision – it's an implementable Action Plan."

The Five Goals outlined in the Action Plan are:

- 1) Build a major campaign to celebrate the distinctiveness of the working landscape that is Vermont.
- 2) Target strategic investment through a Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Development Fund.
- 3) Designate and support “Working Lands.”
- 4) Develop tax revenue to support working landscape enterprise development and conservation.
- 5) Create a State Planning Office and activate the Development Cabinet.

The VWLP, which includes individuals and 170 Vermont organizations, will be working over the next few months to develop legislation that will achieve the goals in the Action Plan. For more information about the plan and to join the campaign go to www.vtrural.org.

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PHOTOS FROM TODAY CAN BE VIEWED AT: <http://vtrural.org/programs/policy-councils/working-landscape/photos>

PRINT QUALITY VERSIONS ON REQUEST (info@vtrural.org)

The Vermont Working Landscape Partnership (VWLP) is a non-partisan and broad-based effort to support local agriculture and forestry, grow and attract farm and forest entrepreneurs, and conserve Vermont’s Working Landscape far into the future. The Partnership’s members believe that all Vermonters benefit from the state’s working landscape and everyone should contribute to ensure its future.