

Creative Corner: 'Natural resource renaissance' rests on state's desire to invest in land

I'm thankful to live in Vermont.

I'm grateful for its heritage of farm and forest stewardship, and the opportunity that it provides for a new generation of Vermonters on the land.

Even in stick season, we have to appreciate the beauty around us, the clean air and water the land provides, the open fields and forests for walking, hunting and just being in the great outdoors.

The Vermont Agency of Commerce has found that the most important attribute reported by businesses for their choice to locate in Vermont is the "quality of life." That includes safety, community and amenities, but it also has to do with our direct connection to the land, to nature, and to our working countryside. For many, it's why we moved to Vermont, or why we stay here.

The land that we love is no accident: It is the product of the myriad economic decisions of generations of Vermont farm and forest families. We need to appreciate their **hardwork** and their commitment to the land.

We all know how crucial farms and forests are to the identity and lifestyle that is essential to the Vermont we love. We also need to recognize that Vermont has a huge opportunity right now to **invest** in our working landscape to keep Vermont strong for generations to come.

Times are tough right now, as jobs move out of state and our young people look elsewhere to build their future.

In this moment when our economic decisions will determine our future, Vermont must invest in diversification and value-added development to seize the incredible economic opportunity we have to lead a **natural resource** renaissance here in Vermont. This investment will bring jobs; attract youth, entrepreneurs and private capital; and build prosperity for communities throughout the state.

The Vermont Working Landscape Partnership includes hundreds of Vermonters and organizations committed to the family farm and forest enterprises

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that sustain Vermont. Its action plan, available at www.vtrural.org, calls for **investments** and supports for innovative working landscape enterprises. Vermont has a unique role to play as a national leader

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in food systems and the natural resource economy. Doing so is our leading "green economy" edge and the best foundation we have for resilience in the face of global climate change, peak oil and international **financial** volatility.

I'm grateful, today, for the Vermont farm families that feed us, the **foresters** who manage the greater part of the state, the wood products entrepreneurs who still make authentic and beautiful products here. I look to a new generation of farm and forest stewards and the tremendous spirit of entrepreneurial energy they bring. And I think — we need to take this work to scale!

A cousin of mine from out of state says, "The working landscape? That is Vermont!" Let's seize the day to make sure of it. Please join us to advance what we love best about this state, revitalize our rural economy, and celebrate those Vermonters who work so hard every day to keep Vermont the Green Mountain State.

Paul Costello is executive director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development and coordinator of the Vermont Working Landscape Partnership.

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