***DRAFT\_*PATHWAYS FOR MITIGATION, AGRICULTURE (D)\_VIABILITY**

**D – Viability**:

Support and empower Vermont’s natural and working lands owners, managers, and caretakers to enhance farm and forest viability and to make informed decisions to increase resilience and adaptation to climate change. How is this going to be done? Through a multi-faceted plan that has a fundamental foundation in education, incentivization and stimulation which will support and enhance farmers, food producers and processors, and enhance local markets with a positive focus on viability, mitigation, and resiliency benefits. Actions will foster partnerships at all levels which will be essential to recognize, grow capacity, and develop strategies for farmers to address climate change.

Some of these strategies and actions will focus particularly on farm or agricultural enterprise business management to assist farmers and food producer businesses to evaluate and take advantage of actions that build, strengthen, and reinforce federal, state, nonprofit and private sector collaboration. That develop, encourage, and strengthen the workforce in organizations to collaborate across food system businesses of different sizes as well as assisting employers in evaluation of the impacts of work force turnover. That provide the funding to hire, through the University of Vermont (UVM) Extension service of livestock specialists, plural, who will provide full-time technical and business assistance to agribusiness enterprises to cover the full range of production and marketing issues for all livestock types and issues, including pork.

A research project should be funded to fully investigate the root causes of household food insecurity and to develop programs to eliminate this scourge on our society. In addition, risk management programs should be developed to assist farmers, land managers and forestry managers to support them when they try new techniques or management skills that promote a beneficial climate response. Training and technical assistance should also be extended for natural land management that will increase farm sustainability.

Importantly, existing programs that are dedicated to farmland access and conservation need not only to be fully funded but expanded. New equity models for land access and ownership, particularly for beginning, socially disadvantaged and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) members of our community, should be created and expanded. In addition, creative land ownership, leasing or land access models that might include multiple users of large tracts of land, where feasible, should be researched. There should also be an assessment of state and municipal permit requirements and regulations, reducing duplication and ineffectiveness and aiding farmers and landowners to navigate the bureaucracy. Importantly, there should also be a focus on innovative funding mechanisms to assist in the implementation of climate smart agriculture.

**STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS**

1. **Support and enhance local food markets for greater viability, mitigation, and resilience benefits:**

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| *Preliminary assessment* |
| *Impact:* Provide farmers with a local outlet for their produce, reducing distribution costs. |
| *Equity:* Making sure sufficient and nutritious food is available to all. |
| *Cost-effectiveness:* Reduces transportation costs |
| *Co-Benefits:* Having a viable local market encourages local food production helping maintain the rural economy. |
| *Technical Feasibility:* Yes |

1. **Foster partnerships at all levels (state, federal, nonprofit, and private sector): essential to recognizing, capacitating, and building strategies for farmers to address climate change and enhance community resilience:**
2. Dedicate funds to support Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Districts and farmer watershed organizations with the specific objective of allowing them to reach other farmers and do farmer-to-farmer education about improved soil and manure management.
3. Maintain the Ag & Ecosystems Subcommittee through development and implementation of the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) and the Carbon Action Plan (CAP) to cultivate, build and reinforce state, federal, nonprofit, and private sector collaborations.
4. Workforce support organizations and trade associations should develop a model for sharing services between food system businesses of different sizes (as written in the 2021-2030 Farm to Plate (F2P) Strategic Plan pg. 166).
5. Train farm and food business advisors to assist their clients with evaluating the cost of turnover and labor shortages and budgeting for the level of compensation needed to attract and retain workers (as written in the 2021-2030 F2P Strategic Plan pg. 166).
6. Hire an additional full-time business and technical advisor specializing in small animal livestock production for UVM Extension. The advisor would provide production assistance for all small livestock operations, other than horses and dairy and beef cattle, and other agribusinesses on the full range of production, health, marketing, and biosecurity concerns. Cost: not less than $100,000 annually.
7. Create an education and outreach program to improve pork production and land management across production systems. Staffing would require UVM Extension to commit to an additional 0.5 – 1.0 Full Time Employee (FTE), with the balance of time used to build partnerships between producers, producer organizations, and additional swine resource personnel. Minimum cost $50,000 – 100,000.
8. Invest in sample business plans, market analyses, and financial benchmarking tools for emerging business models such as, but not limited to, grass-fed beef, hemp/CBD, pork, and value-added dairy products. Cost: around $250,000 over three years.
9. Fund a research project to fully understand household food insecurity in Vermont and how to invest in its elimination. The design and implementation of the research project should engage academics, advocacy groups, and impacted individuals, and include research on geographic spread, root causes, and costs to the health care, educational, and emergency response systems (as written in the 2021-2030 F2P Strategic Plan pg. 158). (Collaborate with Hunger Free Vermont, Vermont Foodbank, VT Releaf Collective).
10. Work closely with USDA NRCS’s 2021 Action Plan for Climate Adaptation and Resilience to leverage resources and increase efficiencies of practice education and implementation.
11. Increase development of cost-benefit analyses for climate smart agricultural practices to incentivize implementation.
12. Provide funding to support two additional FTEs with the Farm and Forest Viability Program. Provide training to ensure adequate knowledge of all options for natural land management that can increase farm sustainability (e.g., land conservation and restoration programs for low productivity acreage).
13. Fund a risk management program that will help farmers try new practices without concern for economic loss. (e.g., BMP challenge concept from 2018 VT climate action plan).

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| *Preliminary assessment* |
| *Impact:* Providing TA and education has broad positive impacts across the whole agriculture sector. |
| *Equity:* Potential to provide access across the whole diverse community with positive results. |
| *Cost-effectiveness: Modest outlay of financial support with considerable potential payoff.* |
| *Co-Benefits:* Crosses a wide sector of the agricultural community with benefits to farmers, land managers, and landowners. |
| *Technical Feasibility:* Yes |

1. **Expand funding for existing programs dedicated to farmland access and conservation, and leverage this funding to increase land access through flexible and new ownership financing mechanisms, policies, and models (e.g., performance mortgages, shared equity models, ground leases, appropriation of $3 million in low-cost capital to a Community Development Financial Institution or other lender, policy incentives to encourage multiple tenants or owners on larger tracts of land, and low-cost and long-term farm leasing on publicly held lands. With a particular emphasis on the needs of beginning, socially disadvantaged, and Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC) farmers (as written in the 2021-2030 F2P Strategic Plan pg. 30).**
2. Research land grabs: what are the potential policy options to avoid them? Ensure that funding of VHCB/VLT/VT Releaf Collective allows for them to be nimbler to counteract this trend.
3. Assist food and farm businesses with navigation of municipal and state permit requirements and regulations. This will create a more supportive environment for business growth and diversification, especially as it relates to on-farm accessory businesses, farm employee housing, and development of off-farm distribution, and storage infrastructure (as written in the 2021-2030 F2P Strategic Plan pg. 33).
4. Investigate innovative funding mechanisms for assisting with implementation of climate smart agricultural practices, crop insurance for diversified Vermont-scale farms, and emergency recovery following extreme weather events, to better respond when climate change related events occur.

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| *Preliminary assessment* |
| *Impact:* Access to land to grow crops and livestock is critical and has high positive impact. |
| *Equity:* For too long lack of access to land and the tools to operate that land, like capital, has been a negative strike against our society. Managing this issue fairly and equitably is vital to our future success for managing our climate. |
| *Cost-effectiveness:* Very cost effective. |
| *Co-Benefits:* Large benefits to farm transition, encouraging and engaged and productive operators producing high quality food in climate wise way. |
| *Technical Feasibility:* Yes |