



2021 Vermont Legislative Updates

Special thanks to Jen Hollar from Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Gordon Merrick from Conservation Law Foundation.

Farmland Protection Funding:

This year Vermont saw a huge win in funding for farmland protection. Governor Phil Scott signed the Appropriations Bill (Act 74) on June 8th, 2021. This bill authorizes the Vermont State Budget for the 2022 Fiscal Year. In addition to base funding for the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, the budget included an additional \$10 million to VHCB for conservation projects including farmland protection. VHCB is the state entity that administers the state's conservation easement programs including farmland protection efforts. The budget also included \$50,000 for VHCB's Farm & Forest Viability Program to help farm, food and forest businesses recover from pandemic related losses.

Farmland Access Legislation for Black, Indigenous, and Other Farmers of Color

To begin to address this disparity in farmland access opportunities and ownership, the Vermont State Legislature introduced two key pieces of legislation during the 2021 Legislative Session, with the goal of increasing land access opportunities for VT's BIPOC communities. With the help of State Representative Brian Cina from Burlington, The [Vermont BIPOC Land Access and Opportunity Act \(H. 273\)](#), formally known as "[An act relating to promoting racial and social equity in land access and property ownership](#)", was first introduced in the Vermont House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs.

The second bill introduced by VT State Representative Katherine Sims was [H.232, An act relating to promoting land, home ownership, and economic Opportunity](#) was also first introduced in the Vermont House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs. While neither of these pieces of legislation passed this session, the advocacy efforts set forth to pass them exemplified the needs and challenges BIPOC in the state face when attempting to purchase homes and farmland.

Soil Health Legislation

Regenerative Agriculture Legislation

This session in Vermont, one policy related to soil health was introduced. [H.292](#), An act relating to a regenerative economy; includes incentives for soil health. The bill was introduced by Representative Brian Cina in the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife. Unfortunately, the committee did not take any action on the bill this session.

American Rescue Plan Act Funding

Payments for Ecosystem Services

The Vermont State Legislature voted to allocate \$250,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for Payment for Ecosystem Services. [Act 9](#)-- An Act Relating to COVID-19 relief that will allow the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to continue the work of soil conservation practices and payment for ecosystem services including paying for the cost of the Soil Conservation Practice and Payment for Ecosystem Service Working Group.

Solar Legislation

The Vermont State Legislature passed [Act 43](#) this session that updates the Current Use Program to allow for very small parcels of farmland or open space that qualifies as managed forestland in accordance with standards established by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks, and Recreation to have (1/10th of an acre) solar arrays. Farmland that is under 1/10th of an acre and is currently enrolled in the Current Use Program will not be removed from the program.