

August 28, 2003
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Farm Viability Program Announces Formation of Advisory Board

The directors of a new program which offers financial and technical advice to Vermont farmers announced today the formation of an advisory board that will hold its first meeting September 2 at the Langevin House on the Vermont Technical College campus in Randolph Center.

The Vermont Farm Viability Enhancement Program is a joint effort of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets. It will provide farmers with on-farm consultation in business planning, as well as additional technical advice from a broad range of specialists. The services will be available starting this fall.

The Advisory Board includes four farmer-members. They are Judy Clark, a Hyde Park dairy farmer; Jane Clifford, a Starksboro dairy farmer; David Major, a Westminster sheep dairy farmer; and Ross Thurber, who is a partner in a diversified dairy and vegetable farm in Brattleboro.

The other four board members are Jo Bradley, Manager of the Vermont Economic Development Authority; Steve Kerr, Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets; Doug Lantagne, Interim Director of UVM Extension; and Gus Seelig, Director of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB).

“I’m looking forward to the implementation of this program,” said Secretary Kerr. “Our farmers are competing against farmers in other parts of the country who can produce milk and other farm products at a lower cost. To stay competitive, Vermont farmers must be excellent managers. Business planning is a key management ingredient because it can show where the strengths and weaknesses are, and suggest changes. A business plan can be a farmer’s road map to profitability.”

Prior to being named to his current position, Kerr chaired the Vermont Agricultural Viability Council, a group of agricultural leaders from around the state who developed a set of agricultural policy recommendations, one of which was the need to establish a farm viability

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enhancement program.

The Farm Viability Enhancement Program will contract with farm technical service providers to work with many types of farmers, from traditional dairy producers to organic vegetable growers, and others. Participation fees from farmers will be nominal. The newly established program is funded by VHCB, a public agency supporting the conservation of farmland and natural areas and the creation of affordable housing.

“The Farm Viability Enhancement Program will be an economic tool for Vermont farmers,” said VHCB’s Gus Seelig. “We want to create something that will allow farmers to explore options for greater profitability, whether it’s transitioning to a new crop or a new market, or simply becoming more efficient with an existing enterprise. This will be a farmer-friendly program.”

Tuesday’s meeting begins at 1:00 p.m. The board will hear a description of similar farm viability programs around the country, will discuss technical assistance needs that may be particular to Vermont farmers, and will evaluate models for service delivery. The public is welcome to attend. For more information, contact the Program Coordinator, Ethan Parke, at 828-0795.

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