https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2020/S.351
https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/Docs/ACTS/ACT138/ACT138%20Act%20Summary.pdf



This act summary is provided for the convenience of the public and members of the General Assembly. It is intended to provide a general summary of the act and may not be exhaustive. It has been prepared by the staff of the Office of Legislative Council without input from members of the General Assembly. It is not intended to aid in the interpretation of legislation or to serve as a source of legislative intent.

**Act No. 138 (S.351). Agriculture; forestry; agricultural fairs; financial assistance; COVID-19 public health emergency**

**An act relating to providing financial relief assistance to the agricultural community due to the COVID-19 public health emergency**

The act establishes a Dairy Farmer Assistance Program at the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM) to provide grants from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) to milk producers and dairy processors that suffered economic harm caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency. The act appropriates $25,000,000.00 of CRF funds to the Dairy Farmer Assistance Program with $21,200,000.00 available for grants to milk producers and $3,800,000.00 available for grants to dairy processors. The maximum amount of a grant award is based on the size of a milk producer's farm or the amount of milk processed per day by a dairy processor.

The act also establishes a Non-dairy Agricultural Producer and Processor Assistance Program at AAFM to provide grants to non-dairy agricultural producers, commercial meat processors, commercial slaughterhouses, and farmers' markets that suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The act appropriates $5,000,000.00 of CRF funds to AAFM for the Program. The maximum amount of a grant award is based on the applicant's annual gross sales. AAFM shall enter a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) to implement and administer the Program.

AAFM shall report to the General Assembly monthly regarding the status of the Dairy Assistance Program and the Non-dairy Agricultural Producer and Processor Assistance Program. The September 1, 2020 report shall include an accounting of the funds remaining in the Non-dairy Agricultural Producer and Processor Assistance Program. If funds remain in the non-dairy program, AAFM may reallocate the non-dairy funds to the Dairy Assistance Program beginning on September 15, 2020.

The act establishes a Forest Economy Stabilization Grant Program at the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) to provide grant payments to forest product businesses that suffered economic harm from COVID-19. The act appropriates $5,000,000.00 of CRF funds to ANR for the Program. The amount of grants shall

be based on a business's demonstrated economic harm, provided that the maximum amount of a grant shall be $100,000.00. ANR shall enter an MOU with VEDA to implement and administer the Program.

The act appropriates $192,000.00 from the CRF to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to provide business, financial, and mental health assistance to farm and food businesses that suffered economic harm due to COVID-19. The act clarifies the Board's corporate authority by providing that it has the authority of a nonprofit corporation. The act also repeals the sunset on the Rural Economic Development Initiative.

The act appropriates $500,000.00 of CRF funds to AAFM for grants to agricultural fairs in the State that have suffered verifiable lost revenues or expenses caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency. To be eligible for an award, an agricultural fair shall be registered with AAFM. AAFM shall award grants equitably to all eligible agricultural fairs in the State.

Effective Date: July 2, 2020