

# USDA VERMONT JOB CREATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION



**FEBRUARY 4, 2010  
CAPITAL PLAZA HOTEL - MONTPELIER, VT**

The USDA roundtable discussion on job creation and economic growth was held at the Capital Plaza Hotel's Ethan Allen Room in Montpelier, Vermont on February 4, 2010.

Hosted by USDA Rural Development and Farm Service Agency, over 30 participants attended and included local agricultural and business leaders, representatives from the Office of Senator Leahy and Senator Sanders, state and federal officials, lenders and economic development organizations. Participants were invited to attend based on their knowledge of both USDA programs and the current economic challenges and opportunities in Vermont.

This conversation, in follow-up to the national conversation started by the President in December, offered participants a venue to highlight the challenges and opportunities specific to job creation and economic growth in rural Vermont.

The participants were welcomed by hosts/moderators Molly Lambert, State Director for Rural Development, and Bob Paquin, State Director for Farm Service Agency. A video presentation of USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan opened the conversation and the following questions provided by the White House were then discussed. Comments from the attendees follow:

**1. What parts of your local economy *are* working or thriving? What business sectors *are* hiring?**

- Small business startups are increasing, technology companies in particular, although
  - ◆ they are difficult to finance from a “traditional” bank perspective and
  - ◆ infrastructure and a trained workforce is needed.
- “Green Sectors” - two local companies that support wind and electric vehicles have just announced expansions
- Specialty foods, especially those interfacing with local agriculture
- Diversified agricultural producers - farm markets are taking advantage of trend to eat local - not big job creators but are diversifying the economy. Several sectors feed into this: equipment supply, technology, marketing and product sales.
- Health and wellness sectors
- Manufactures that are seen as environmentally friendly
- ARRA money has created jobs. Central Vermont Community Action has grown from 185 to 230 employees. Weatherization program has expanded and is providing opportunity.
- Software and software related industries - believe offshore movement has peaked.
- USDA Rural Development's Intermediary Relending Program (IRP) money has been key to funding small business at VEDA (VT Economic Development Authority). Access to stable IRP funding is key to keeping VEDA's capital costs affordable.
- Discretionary ARRA funding to the state that was provided to VEDA has subsidized \$14 million in loans down to 2% interest and leveraged \$41 million in other capital.

**2. What parts of your local economy are *not* working or thriving? What businesses and sectors have been hit the hardest? What are people struggling with the most?**

- Manufacturing
- Dairy sector is extremely stressed – statewide issue.
- Traditional line of credit financing isn't working. Constriction in working assets is hindering ability of businesses to “grow” out of recessionary positions.
- Lack of slaughterhouse capacity hinders value added meat sector
- Construction contractors are suffering – ARRA generally assisted the large contractors
- Loggers and truckers are stressed due to low pricing, – foreign competition is a factor. Landowners suffering with prices that are 1/3 or more lower than what they were 5 years ago – causing difficult choices on whether to harvest or not. Those hit the hardest are those that can't "raise their price" - the landowners.
- In Northeast Kingdom - broadband and transportation.
- All business needs robust broadband – often not available
- Businesses in the downtowns hit the hardest are retail. They are barely hanging on and are at the tipping point. Many who have put in years of hard work will not survive.
- Wood products companies are challenged to sell against foreign competitors that don't have to meet the same labor, environmental and other regulations that U.S. firms are held accountable to.
- Artisan sector – difficult to find consumers willing to purchase high end product in this economy
- Small retail is struggling across the state. Contributing factor is credit card processing fees are excessive in comparison to the service rendered.
- Architects are reporting a slow-down – this is not a good sign for the next construction season
- Travel and tourism – cost of gas and economy is still having an adverse effect
- Private weatherization contractors are just hanging on. The consumer is waiting for the “cash for caulkers” program to kick in, so have stopped work until this occurs.

**3. What are the *opportunities* for growth in your community? What businesses and sectors seem poised to rebound? What do you see as jobs of the future?**

- Government contracts
- Legacy industries, the businesses that use and need Vermont's natural resources
- Higher education and on-line education
- Niche vs. commodity industries
- Biomass energy - it could be big, but is not off the ground yet.
- Aviation industry - VT Technical College is developing an aviation program
- Canadian business recruitment for VT counties on border

**4. What are the *obstacles* to job creation in your community? What could make local businesses more likely to start hiring? What could make local businesses more likely to start hiring?**

- Champlain bridge closure on Lake Champlain has been a huge obstacle with a ripple effect.
- Small businesses are reluctant to re-hire because laying off is so difficult.
- Access to affordable health care
- Lack of qualified and eligible employees in certain technical sectors such as engineering and industrial maintenance.
- Aging workforce
- Workers comp and unemployment insurance
- If we want biomass to develop, we need to think regionally on a policy basis.
- Money was “fast” to Wall Street, but effective “slow” money is needed to invigorate rural economies.
- “Near equity” investments
- Increase connectivity and build stronger networks across supply chains.
- CEO leadership development and training, including management skills and business acumen.
- Immigration reform in dairy industry - maintaining that workforce is critical.
- Develop local markets such as the City Market (Burlington, VT). A USDA direct B&I loan funded this co-op and it is now one of the greatest grossing retail store per square foot in Vermont, possibly in the Northeast. Over \$1,700/sq.ft. in sales. Approximately 80% of product sold at the City Market is Vermont sourced or otherwise purchased from Vermont supply channels.
- The cost of going from a self-employed business to a small employer has a lot of barriers. Taxes, insurances - this needs to be simplified
- Aging business owners no longer want to take risk.
- There is a strong buy local movement - would like to see expanded to products other than food such as wood products.

**5. What other issues and ideas should the President consider?**

- Recovery Zone Utility bonds under ARRA have only recently been “worked out”. The 12/31/10 deadline is going to be problematic. If that could be extended it would be good.
- Rural America “Main Street” needs slow money - low interest rate and high risk.
- VT has great infrastructure to do weatherization and use ARRA funds, but other parts of the country don't and haven't been able to use the funding. Consider allowing money from states that don't use to be redistributed to the states that do.
- USDA RD and SBA reduction in fees has been effective. Important to continue.
- SBA ARC (America's Recovery Capital) loan program is completely dysfunctional from an administrative perspective.
- More resources needed for SBDC programs. High dividend payoff compared to cost of support.

- Provide federal money to quasi-public entities (like VT Economic Development Authority) to stimulate business lending
- Look at what has worked. What funding program did Ben and Jerry's and Cabot Cheese (two of Vermont's most successful businesses) use to get where they are today? UDAG (Urban Development Action Grants). That was a sensational program, bring it back.
- IRP relending program needs more support. It is effective and works. More IRP money is needed.
- EB-5 immigration program is starting to show very positive results in Vermont. It is an innovative source of equity investment coming to some VT companies.
- Farm Loan guarantees in FSA are critical to support.
- USDA RD Business & Industry guarantee program needs more flexibility to address today's economic realities.
- Bank regulators: the "one size fits all" regulatory environment is crimping rural community banks – the credit problem did not start there – new regulation is adversely impacting a lending sector that was meeting the needs of small business.
- Take the recovered TARPP money and provide to community banks for small business lending.
- Access to federal capital has become excessively and unnecessarily complex across a multitude of programs. This deters use by those that have the greatest need or have limited resources to pay for specialty consultants to prepare complex packages.
- Anything you do for small business NEEDS TO BE SIMPLE. Much of the ARRA funding requirements are just too complicated
- We have been through the era of international trade and globalization. If it is such a wonderful thing, why are we where we are now? Think long and hard about the U.S. economic future and globalization.

**6. Are there specific changes to USDA programs and regulations that could positively impact the development of businesses in Rural America or strengthen current businesses? What innovative ideas should USDA consider to increase economic opportunity in rural areas?**

- Loan guarantees should be expanded to foreign owned companies that are acquiring fixed assets in the U.S.
- Allow B&I program to guarantee lines of credit.
- More frequent funding cycles and more money for Rural Business Enterprise Grants.
- Reduce grant recipient reporting requirements.
- Food safety sector needs a tiered approach to regulation.
- Expand the IRP program resources, it is very effective - one attendee had run a fund for 14 years and has never seen the demand so high. Need more funding – currently waiting over a year to receive.
- Farm Loan guarantees are critical to the agriculture sector.
- B&I guarantee program needs simplification and flexibility.
- Youth loan program: \$5000 is not enough. A lot of young people want to start businesses and would use this more if amount was greater.

- Increase “rural” definition to 50,000 for all USDA business programs – particularly IRP relending program, as 25,000 population limit for that program is too restrictive.
- Many farmers want to diversify or do value added but they need patient capital to do this.
- Solicit input to this question from USDA staff. They know best how programs could change to be more effective.
- Recovery Zone Bonds have been difficult to establish and the window to utilize is very short (December 30, 2010). Consider extending this deadline.
- Need effective workforce training programs
- Need broadband everywhere
- Local USDA staff are cooperative and responsive – continue to support local delivery of USDA programs.
- Many communities are investigating biomass district heating systems but heating utilities are not eligible for USDA Rural Utilities Service programs. Consider funding community/district heating in addition to electric, telecommunications and water/wastewater utilities.

### **Executive Summary**

The Vermont roundtable was fortunate to have in attendance a diverse group of business representatives, lenders, public officials and economic developers. The challenges and opportunities are not dissimilar from those expressed in other states.

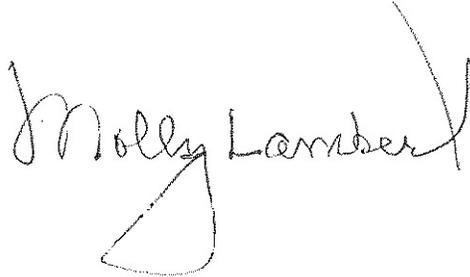
Economic problems and demographic issues that plagued Vermont agriculture and businesses before the current downturn for the most part still exist. These include an aging workforce, high costs of health care and difficulties attracting a skilled workforce for the high skilled jobs as well as preserving the migrant workforce critical to the dairy industry.

There is much enthusiasm for business development that is occurring in local and value added agriculture, green energy and the technology sector and continued frustration with the ups and downs of commodity agriculture and manufacturing.

Vermont is a small state and our farms and traditional businesses are also small. Some government programs, including the ARRA programs, are working well and others are considered far too complex for the average small business and farmer. The additional flexibility and reduced fees that ARRA provided to the RD and SBA guarantee programs were recognized as beneficial. There was much emphasis on the need for slow and patient capital and recommendations that a “one size fits all” approach to financial incentives and regulatory requirements should be avoided as they do not generally work for small farms and businesses, the backbone of the Vermont economy.

The USDA staff in Vermont appreciated the leadership opportunity of hosting this job forum and presenting the feedback to both USDA nationally and the President.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly Lambert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'M'.

MOLLY LAMBERT  
STATE DIRECTOR  
USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Paquin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'R'.

ROBERT PAQUIN  
STATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
USDA FARM SERVICE AGENCY

Attachments:

1. Invite List
2. Attendee List
3. Press Release

Vermont Jobs Creation and Economic Growth Roundtable Discussion  
Attachment 1

RSVP	FirstName	LastName	Title	OrganizationName
	Roger	Allbee	Secretary	VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
YES	William	Belongia	Executive Director	Vermont Community Loan Fund
	Betsy	Bishop	President	Vermont Chamber of Commerce
	Larry	Blansord	President/CEO	Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Inc.
	Jan	Blittersdorf	CEO/President	NRG Systems Inc
	Jo	Bradley	Chief Executive Officer	Vermont Economic Development Authority
	Tayt	Brooks	Commissioner	VT Dept of Housing, Economic & Community Development
YES	Darcy	Carter	District Director	U. S. Small Business Administration
	John	Castaldo	Executive Director	Barre Granite Association
	Frank	Cioffi	President	Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation
	Patricia	Coates	State Director	Office of Congressman Peter Welch
YES	Hal	Cohen	Executive Director	Central Vermont Community Action Council
	Larry	Copp	Corporate President & Economist	Economic & Policy Resources Inc.
YES	Paul	Costello	Executive Director	Vermont Council on Rural Development
	Christopher	D'Elia	President	Vermont Bankers Association
	Steve	Dimick	President	Randolph National Bank
	Judy	Doerner	State Conservationist	USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
	Kevin	Dorn	Secretary	VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development
	Sandra	Dragon	President	Associated Industries of Vermont
	Vicky	Drew		USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
	Allen "Chip"	Evans	Executive Director	VT Human Resources Investment Council
	Philip	Fiermonte	Acting State Director/Outreach Director	Office of Senator Bernie Sanders
YES	Bob	Flint	Executive Director	Springfield Regional Development Corporation
YES	Jon	Freeman	President	Northern Community Investment Corporation
	Steve	Geller	Executive Director	Southeastern Vermont Community Action
	Kenneth	Gibbons	President	Union Bank
	Joan	Goldstein	Executive Director	Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation
	Beatrice	Grause	President & CEO	Vermont Association of Hospitals & Health Systems
	Robin	Gronlund	Executive Director	Women Business Owners Network
	David	Hallquist	Chief Executive Officer	Vermont Electric Cooperative, Inc.
	Jeffrey	Hollender	President	Seventh Generation
YES	Monica	Hutt	Director of Operations	Vermont Department for Children and Families
	Bruce J.	Hyde	Commissioner	Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing
	Vincent	Illuzzi	Vermont State Senator	Vermont State Legislature

# Vermont Jobs Creation and Economic Growth Roundtable Discussion

## Attachment 1

### Page 2

YES	Ellen	Kahler	Executive Director	Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
	Fred	Kenney	Executive Director	Vermont Economic Progress Council
	Lawrence	Keyes	Board	Vermont Software Developers' Alliance
	Warren	Kitzmiller	Vermont State Representative	Vermont State Legislature
	Larry	Kupferman	Director	Burlington Community & Economic Development Office
YES	Doug	Lantagne	Director	UVM Extension
YES	Ed	Larson	Executive Director	Vermont Forest Products Association
	Jeffery	Lewis	Executive Director	Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation
	Andrea	Livermore	Executive Director	Building a Better Brattleboro
	Adam	Lougee	Executive Director	Addison County Regional Planning Commission
	Roberta	MacDonald	Senior Vice President of Marketing	Cabot Creamery Cooperative, Inc.
NO	Stephen	Marsh	President	Community National Bank
YES	Rick	Marsh	President	Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association
YES	Sam	Matthews	Executive Vice President	Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation
	Joel	Melnick	President	Nathaniel Group Inc
	Jeanne	Montross	Executive Director	Addison County Community Action Group
	Carol	Moore	President	Lyndon State College
NO	Patricia	Moulton Powden	Commissioner	Vermont Department of Labor
	Susan	Murray	Director	U. S. Department of Commerce
	Peter	Odierna	Executive Director	Bennington County Industrial Corporation
	Robert	Paquin	State Executive Director	USDA Farm Service Agency
YES	Will	Patten	Executive Director	Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
	Steven	Patterson	Executive Director	Northeastern Vermont Development Association
	Thomas	Pelletier	President and CEO	Northfield Savings Bank
			Executive Director	Renewable Energy Vermont
	Kenneth	Perine	President	National Bank of Middlebury
	George	Putnam	President - CEO	Yankee Farm Credit
YES	Lenae	Quillen-Blume	State Director	VT Small Business Development Center
	Parker	Riehle	President	Vermont Ski Areas Association
	Linda	Rooker	Executive Director	Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council Inc,
	Chuck	Ross	State Director	Office of Senator Patrick Leahy
	Arthur	Sanborn	Executive Director	Lamoille Economic Development Corporation
YES	Robin	Scheu	Executive Director	Addison County Economic Development Corp.
	Tim	Searles	Executive Director	Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity
	Michael	Seaver	President & CEO	Chittenden Bank
	Michael	Smith	President-VT	FairPoint Communications
YES	Tim	Smith	Executive Director	Franklin County Industrial Development Corp.
	James	Stewart	Executive Director	Rutland Economic Development Corporation
	Mike	Tuttle	President & CEO	Merchants Bank
	Lisa	Ventriss	President	Vermont Business Roundtable
	Ellen	Vollinger		Food Research and Action Center
YES	Cathy	Voyer	Executive Vice President	Associated General Contractors of Vermont
YES	Mike	Rainville	President	Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association
NO	Kathleen	Wanner	Executive Director	Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association
	Patrick	Wood	Chief Environmental Accountant	AgRefresh
	Dan	Yates	President	Building a Better Brattleboro
	Bob	Young	President	Central Vermont Public Service Corp
NO	Laurie	Herbert	Senior Recruiter	National Life Group
	John	Wall	President	Wall-Goldfinger

Vermont Jobs Creation and Economic Growth Roundtable Discussion  
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	Tom	Gallagher	Vice President	Peoples Bank
	Robin	Shanahan	Vice President	Chittenden Bank
	Mark	Young	President	First National Bank Of Orwell
	Thomas J	Bellavance	President	Ag Venture Financial Services, Inc.
	Brandon	Poginy	Vice President	Community National Bank
YES	Mary	Peabody	UVM Extension Specialist, Commun	Women's Agricultural Network (WAgN)
	Leon	Berthiaume		St. Albans Cooperative
	Jackie	Folsom	Executive Director	Vermont Farm Bureau, Inc
YES	Jane	Clifford	Executive Director	Green Mountain Dairy Farmers Cooperative Federation
	Enid	Wonnocott		NOFA
	Allison	Hooper		VT Butter & Cheese
	Arnold	Coombs	Chair	Vermont Maple Industry Counsel
	Jim	Bushey		Bourdeaus' and Bushey Inc
	Remi	Bourdeau		Bourdeau Brothers
	Sarah	Brannon Kittell	Senator - Chair Ag Committee	Vermont Senate
	Carolyn	Partridge	Representative - Chair Ag Committe	Vermont House Representative
	Jeff	Hutchins	President	Harvest Equipment
	Butch	Greenwood	President	LW Greenwood
	Mike	Hendy		HENDY BROTHERS, INC
	Brian	Carpenter	General Manager	Champlain Valley Equipment, Inc
	Robert	Wellington		AgriMark
	John	Cleary		Organic Valley
	Josh	Poulin	President	Poulin Feeds
	Jerry	Booth	President	Booth Bros. Dairy
				VT Cheese Council
				Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese
	Bob/Peter	James		Momument Farm
	John	Thomas		Thomas Dairy
	Rob	Michalak		Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc
YES	Janice	St. Onge		VSJF
YES	Bruce	Seifer	Assistant Director	Burlington Community and Economic Development Office
NO	John	Canning	(Recommended by Bruce Seifer)	VT Software Developers Alliance
NO	Bret	Golann	(Recommended by Bruce Seifer)	VT BioScience Alliance at UVM
YES	Ed	Antczak	Economic Development Specialist	Burlington Community and Economic Development Office
YES	Christopher	Johnson	PHR Director	Technical Connection, Inc.
YES	Mary	Carlson	Food & Nutrition Program Coordinat	VT Dept for Children & Families-Economic Services Division
YES	Renee	Richardson	Food & Nutrition Program Director	VT Dept for Children & Families
YES	Geoff	Wilcox		Office of Economic Opportunity
YES	Bill	Church	Board Member	VT BioScience Alliance at UVM/President-Green Mountain A
YES	Jeff	Munger		Office of Senator Bernie Sanders
YES	Jay	McGrath		Cabot Cheese
	Jon-Michael	Muise	(Tentative)	
YES	Rob	Allen		Natural Resource Conservation Service

Vermont Jobs Creation and Economic Growth Roundtable Discussion  
Attachment 2

RSVP	FirstName	LastName	Title	Organization Name	Address	City	State	Zip	Telephone
YES	Rob	Allen		Natural Resource Conservation Service					
YES	Ed	Antosick	Economic Development Specialist	Burlington Community and Economic Development Office					
YES	William	Beloche	Executive Director	Vermont Community Loan Fund	P.O. Box 027	Montpelier	VT	05601	(802) 223-1448 802-241-2458
YES	Wray	Carlson	Food & Nutrition Program Coordinator	VT Dept for Children & Families Economic Services Division	601 W. Williston, FRAC Newsletter				
YES	Darcy	Carter	Director Director	U. S. Small Business Administration	87 Shaw Street Room 305	Montpelier	VT	05601	(802) 828-4422 x 209
YES	Chad	Cham	Board Member	VT Backcountry Alliance (VAC) Eastern Green Mountain Area					
YES	Jane	Ellison	Executive Director	Capital Vermont Community Action Council					493-8810
YES	Fel	Coover	Executive Director	Vermont Council on Rural Development	166 W. Hill Street 45 State Street, Suites 2 & 3 POB 384	Barre	VT	05641	(802) 479-1053
YES	Paul	Costello	Executive Director	Vermont Council on Rural Development		Montpelier	VT	05601	(802) 228-5734
YES	Bob Ann	Finley		Northam FOSD					
YES	Bob	Finley	Executive Director	Springfield Regional Development Corporation	14 Gibson Street Suite 7	Springfield	VT	05156	(802) 375-9027
YES	Jan	Freeman	President	Northam Community Investment Corporation	247 Portland Street	St. Johnsbury	VT	05418	(802) 474-3111 x 12
YES	Marcia	Gar	Director of Operations	Vermont Department for Children and Families	Chambers Street Office 5 North	Washburn	VT	05671	(802) 471-2250
YES	Christopher	Jarman	CEO Director	Verano Connection, Inc.	1 Sparks St. Suite 305	LaGrange	VT	05603	802-458-5034
YES	Ellen	Karns	Executive Director	Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund	3 Miller Court, Suite 301 West 35 College Rd.	Montpelier	VT	05602	(802) 428-5320
YES	Doug	Larimore	Director	LWM Education	258 Kingsbury Hall	Burlington	VT	05401	(802) 296-2290
YES	Ed	Larson	Executive Director	Vermont Forest Products Association	85 W. 11	Montpelier	VT	05602	802-249-8172
YES	Rick	Marsh	President	Vermont Maple Syrup Makers' Association	3060 W. Rte. 15	Jeffersonville	VT	05464	802-644-5422 (74)
YES	Sam	Mathews	Executive Vice President	Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation	Cap National Life Drive P.O. Box 428	Montpelier	VT	05602	(802) 221-4454
YES	Joe	McGee	CEO	Capitol Office					
YES	Jan	Kurger		Office of Senator Bernie Sanders					
YES	W	Patt	Executive Director	Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility	101 Lake Street, Suite 203	Burlington	VT	05401	(802) 424-8247
YES	Wray	Forsyth	USDA - Business Specialist, Commercial	Vermont State Dept. of Labor, Veterans & Youth	617 Campbell Street, Suite 3	Burlington	VT	05401	(802) 253-2289
YES	Laura	Quinn-Kelms	State Director	VT State of Economic Development Center	1100 Lee Hill	Randolph Center	VT	05491	(802) 728-910
YES	Nick	Russell	President	Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association					
YES	Renee	Richardson	Food & Nutrition Program Director	VT Dept for Children & Families	105 W. Wray Center Hiller Volkmann, FRAC				
YES	Robert	Scho	Executive Director	Adirondack County Economic Development Corp.	500 RT 7 South	Windsor	VT	05757	(802) 390-7573
YES	Ernie	Setzer	Assistant Director	Burlington Community and Economic Development Office					
YES	Tim	Smith	Executive Director	Franklin County Industrial Development Corp.	7 North Main Street 110 Lee Hill	St Albans	VT	05478	(802) 294-2194
YES	Jane	St. George		VSII					
YES	Daisy	Wray	Executive Vice President	Association General Contractors of Vermont	110 W. Hill	Montpelier	VT	05601	802-223-2274
YES	Paul	Wray		Office of Economic Opportunity					
*	Chris	D'Elia		VT Bankers Assoc					
*	Steve	Greenfield		VEDA					
*	Stewart,	Jamie		REDC					
*	Chuck	Ross		Lakewood					
*	Trish	Seaw		New Portland					
*	Steve	Mattson		NEKTI Consulting					
*	Joe	Marone		UPT					
		WCHX							

Contact: Anita Rios Moore (802) 828-6006

## **ROUNDTABLE ON JOBS, ECONOMIC GROWTH HOSTED BY USDA**

### *Business Owners, Residents, Community Leaders Shared Ideas on Creating Jobs*

Montpelier, VT, February 9, 2010 – USDA Rural Development State Director, Molly Lambert, and Farm Service Agency State Executive Director, Robert Paquin, hosted a roundtable discussion on job creation and economic growth in Montpelier, VT, this past Thursday, February 4, 2010. The roundtable followed the Forum on Jobs and Economic Growth that President Obama hosted at the White House on December 3.

“This forum provided an opportunity for residents, business owners and community leaders across the state to share ideas on creating jobs and economic opportunities,” Molly Lambert said. “Government can help lay the groundwork for economic growth, but the best ideas for continued growth and job creation often come from local and community leaders. I look forward to sharing these ideas with the Administration.” “It was especially important to hear about ways USDA programs could be modified to provide greater help in economic recovery,” Paquin added.

The roundtable included business owners, residents, state and local officials, non-profit organizations, community leaders, and other interested parties. Participants discussed steps that can be taken to grow the economy and put Vermonters back to work.

The primary focus was on ideas to accelerate job growth in rural America. Some of the topics discussed were:

- Exploring ways to rejuvenate and promote local businesses;
- Creating jobs by rebuilding America’s infrastructure;
- Creating new opportunities from existing ones, such as with value-added agricultural products;
- Supporting job growth among small businesses; and
- Preparing workers for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs.

USDA Rural Development administers and manages more than 40 housing, business, and community infrastructure and facility programs as laid out by Congress through a network of 6,100 employees located in 500 national, state and local offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of rural communities, businesses, residents, farmers and ranchers and improve the quality of life in rural America. Rural Development has an existing portfolio of more than \$125 billion in loans and loan guarantees.

USDA's Farm Services Agency works to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for rural Americans. Some of the agency's efforts include facilitating income support, disaster assistance and conservation programs, providing operating loans for the procurement of farm equipment, seed and fertilizer, as well as offering ownership loans to help new and veteran producers purchase a farm. FSA also works to procure various commodities to benefit low-income families through domestic food assistance programs.

#

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