Today on Across the Fence Vermont's greatest resource the working landscape. It's valued for a number of reasons including scenic economic and environmental benefits. To ensure the working landscape’s viability a new campaign contends now is the time to act. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. Earlier this month the Vermont Working Landscape Council released a series of recommendations calling for investment in our farm and forest future.

To learn about those goals and recommendations I'm joined by two guests. Paul Costello is Executive Director of the Rural Vermont Council on Rural Development and John Meyer one of the Working Landscape Council members who authored the new report welcome to both of you. Paul I first spoke with you about this the future of working landscapes nearly a year ago and a lot has happened can you tell me a little bit about that.

Paul.: You know that the Vermont council on rural development led the process of the council on the future of Vermont which was a major study of what Vermonters value what matters to us. In that process Vermonters said the working landscape is essential to our future our identity our economic foundations the foundations of the so called green economy and it's essential for us to preserve it but meanwhile we found a major contradiction with the challenge to the dairy economy and the challenge to the forest products economy and then opportunities for new business development and for a new generation of folks who are interested in working in the sector. Our plan has come out this week we're delighted to be here with you Judy to share some of the key features of it but essentially we're saying were at a point in history where we have to make a choice. We have to decide whether we're going to ensure the survival and strength of the working landscape of the future and to do so we're going to need to invest in an economic foundation.
Judy.: You've indicated that the clock is ticking on working lands.

Paul.: Will the trends are not so good for the dairy economy and the forest product industry has its challenges to which John can share but there's tremendous opportunity in the growth of the local foods movement of farmers markets of small scale farming and organics but for us to be successful in using the land wisely those opportunities and opportunities on the forest side have to be pursued. We have to be dedicated to these things we say we stand for this as essential to the future of Vermont. We have to make a decision that we are going to be committed to it as well.

Judy.: Let's talk about this new report from the Vermont working landscape council. Investing in our farm and forest future. What with the goals that drove the council in this research?

Paul.: We believe that we all love the view and we love the services and love the ability to recreate but we have to understand that the foundation of the working landscape is an economy in that we need to ensure that the farm and forest economy is a vital foundation for the future of Vermont. We need to recharge the Vermont brand and make this central to the economic policy to attract a new generation of entrepreneurs to the land. We need to sustain the ecological services and public benefits of working lands everything from the view to the role of the economy for tourism to recreation and the ecological services of clean water clean air that are provided wildlife habitat that are all provided by the farm and forest for our long-term future.

Judy.: John from your perspective what's the most important thing in participating in this project?

John.: For me it's been very exciting to purchase a pate because this project puts an emphasis on the notion that these are working lands. I think that's their dynamic and that's an important approach to solving this problem of the future's resources. I think many people have viewed our forest resource as the pristine backdrop or what defines Vermont as being important too many Vermonters in a Vermont lifestyle. But this initiative I think emphasizes the economic importance of the resource that this resource is important two providing a multiplicity of jobs Products Energy and is the backdrop for industries and economic activities that provide thousands of jobs to Vermonters. So in short what's important is that this working landscape initiative is not only about the land but about the people who work on the land.
Judy.: I should mention that John is the president of Barter Land in Lumber company in Montpelier and he's been a consulting forester for 30 years and is on the board of both the Vermont Forest Products Association and the Vermont Woodlands Association. He's also part of the 16 member working landscape council. Paul if part of the council's report is specific action steps then what are they and how can they make a difference?

Paul.: There's five of them Judy and first is that we need to build a major campaign to celebrate the distinctiveness of Vermont's working landscape. It's essential to us as part of our long-term future we can raise a flag that Vermont is going to be a center for the National Food Systems movement. The Center for Natural Resource Innovation. We can capture the imagination of a new generation of young people including our own children that this is a key point to our future that there's going to be jobs in this arena. We have to follow that rhetorical kind of statement with investment. We need to target specific investments two of Vermont agriculture and forest products development fund that unifies state and nonprofit efforts to drive. We need to build an engine that supports entrepreneur as high growth businesses and the infrastructure that's going to allow this sector to perceived and realize its potential and the next few years. We need to designate and support working lands themselves by having a particular category that goes from current use to add benefits to those lands that are foundations for the rural economy to support their long-term conservation action. We're going to need to invest in this and that means we're going to develop revenue. If we believe and working landscape as a foundation for the future we need to make the decision that were going to invest and that means tax revenue. That's a challenging point what we think is essential for us to raise it and that we need to have a debate in Vermont about how we invest.

Judy.: I was going to say this all sounds great and I think everybody would agree that this is important but all the sudden when you say taxes people say oh wait seconds.

Paul.: Yes I like everything up to that point and that's natural but that's the kind of conversation we've been having for 40 years where every time you have a policy debate about this we say we need to invest in value added diversification in the national resource economy and then we don't or we shy back from that because of the challenge of finding public resource. If it's of public value we have to find a public resource. Finally we need a plan that are and we have a platform piece that says we need to strengthen the development cabinet which this administration is doing the Shumlin Administration is doing. But also make sure it has the planning expertise through a planning office that can unify economic development and land use planning in a single
site so that this issue is thought of in a central way as policies develop for the future.

Judy.: It almost sounds like you're taking the idea of a working landscape and developing a business plan for it.

Paul.: We're thinking what do we need to do for 20 years and let's not just talk philosophically let's talk practically about what you need to do if you're going to have the kind of working landscape we have today to pass on to our children and grandchildren.

Judy.: John the designation of working land is important to you why?

John.: As a forester I think this is an important feature because as we know if it takes 80 to 100 years to grow tree too a commercial timber product. To do that it requires a landowner for landowners to invest in that forest resource over a long period of time. This takes a tremendous commitment. Perhaps over several generations. So we need regulatory and tax policies that are going to be stable be predictable and encourage the long-term timber investment. I come to this from the approach probably in my background of forestry timber in that applies to agriculture as well but I think the notion of a working landscape provides the rationale to see this happen.

Judy.: Because some of the pressures that are on people who own these tracts of land I would imagine if intends to sell or to do something else with property?

John.: Yes a timber investment has to produce more value in timber than the timber holding costs to get it through the rotation of the life cycle of that tree. The tax costs in particular are more than the value of the annual growth a landowner's going to say maybe there's another possibility or alternative opportunity are as of them growing timber. That would be a tragedy for Vermont’s force and landscapes.

Judy.: So when you see as the opportunities and challenges?

John.: The challenges in our industry I think have been manifold of recent. The economic downturn of 2008 we are still feeling the repercussions of that. Prices of forest products have fallen our operating costs increased due to a largely energy prices. We've had very wet summers warm winters there's a number of things going on that are difficult. It's very expensive to buy machinery for a young person going into our industry. The capital costs. But these problems have been around for a long time and they really nothing new. I think what's
exciting now is that there's a changing attitude of the public towards for student working landscapes. The public is becoming aware of what we do. So much of what we do is hidden in the woods and people may not be aware that there's a timber sale going on or people employed out there. This working landscape report brings forth the message that these problems need action we need policies that work and I think it can happen. This is a good entree into public awareness of what we need to do.

Judy.: Which is why it's important to link together farms and forestry.

John.: Yes. But we've had a long history in Vermont. The agricultural enforce communities working together for 30 years we've had the current use program which has been a cornerstone underpinning the agricultural and forest economies providing taxes that are appropriate to the value of the products we produce. That program has periodically come under scrutiny in the legislature for funding or for change and the agricultural and the forest communities have demonstrated that they work together very nicely mutually supporting each other's interests to ensure that the vital program continues. That I think with respect to this new initiative of bringing these concerns public and looking for action and change we can continue with that process successfully and we must because as we know the stakes are very high.

Judy.: I mentioned earlier that the council had 16 members but those 16 were selected from a much larger group that makes up the working landscape partnership. Paul how large is the partnership now?

Paul.: It's approaching 500 individual members and 170 different organizations and businesses supporting this common agenda. I think the big picture and in part of what john is saying about the connection between agriculture and forestry is that we need to think about the working landscape isn't just an accident that beautiful view is not an accident. The strong forest that surrounds us the open land around our communities the working landscape that we love as Vermonters is the result of enumerable family decisions by farm and forest families who have dedicated their lives and made business decisions around how they can economically prosper long-term and those decisions have led to who the stewardship of this incredibly precious resource. Vermont's number one asset decides to people. We all benefit from the working landscape in so many ways from recreation to it being the thing that makes Vermont Vermont. We all need two contribute to its long-term future if it's going to survive and prosper into the future. That message is very powerful to us and it's reaching a lot of people who are really interested and we're going to need help. This is going to be a campaign that we're bringing to the governor and
legislature to make this a fundamental priority and it's a priority in line with a very challenge time after Irene. We need to think about the resilience of Vermont in the face of global climate change and economic transitions. When we think of the Greenup, may we need to see that the working landscape is the absolute foundation of any green economy and agriculture and forestry are the absolute foundation. When we think of resilience in the face of some of the challenges we could face in the future having that strong natural resource base is just fundamental to us and to are prospects for the future.

Judy.: I'd like to mention to our viewers if they want to get involved in the future of Vermont’s working landscape they can call the council on rural development that number is (802)-223-6091. You can also find information on the web goat two VT rural.org. Thanks so much for being with us today.

Paul.: Thank you Judy.

John.: It's a pleasure.

Judy.: That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

Across the fence is brought to you as a public service by the University of Vermont extension and WCAX TV.