

Interim Report
Maine Agriculture, Food & Forest Products
Investment Fund Assessment

Attachment 2: Preliminary Stakeholder Questions

December 1, 2021

Note: the approach outlined below is preliminary and subject to refinement at the discretion of DACF and other collaborating partners.

For All Sectors

- Describe the nature of your role and/or business, and how long you've been in this role.
- Provide a brief history of:
 - the growth of your business and the type of financing you've received to date to get to where you are today (or),
 - your institution or organization and the evolution of the services it provides to agriculture, food and/or forestry businesses.

Business Owners (including Underrepresented Individuals)

Questions specific to their business:

- Do you currently need financing capital to grow your business?
- What kind of capital do you need?
- Have you been able to access the financial capital you need to grow your business?
- If yes, how did you access this capital?
- If not, how has this constrained your business growth/goals?
- What has prevented you from accessing capital?
- Do you have a clear idea where you want your business to be in 5 years? What steps do you think are going to be the most challenging?
- If grants were not available, or knowing you can't consistently rely on grants being available, what other forms of capital would be most helpful in achieving your business growth/goals?
- What barriers have you experienced in trying to start/expand your business or program?
- Have you experienced any major changes or trends impacting your business over the last several years? Positive or negative?

Questions re: technical assistance:

- Do you feel that you have a good idea of what resources or supports currently exist at your stage of business development?
- Are there industry-specific or more general business advisory services or technical assistance (tools, programs or resources) that have been helpful to you?

- Who have you collaborated or partnered with successfully in developing your business/program?
- What kind of TA have you used?
- Are there tools, programs or resources you know of that you haven't been able to successfully access?
- What kind of TA have you been unable to find that would be most helpful for your business?

Questions re: financing environment:

- What capital is missing that is crucial for the development and growth of a robust and thriving Maine food or forest economy?
- What are the major infrastructure gaps that you see in today's food system or forestry sector that if addressed would help build a more robust Maine food or forest-based economy? (Do you think infrastructure investment is what's needed for building a more robust food or forest-based economy?)
- What do you think are the priorities for investment for food or forestry business investment that would support and grow a thriving Maine food or forest economy?
- Are there ways that you think a new investment fund could help redress racial and other inequities in your sector?
- Are there other individuals you would recommend be interviewed?

Policy Makers

- Do you believe that the state should play a role in the direct investment and support of food, farm, and forestry businesses in the state? If so, what is the ideal type and scale of state involvement and financial support for these businesses?
- What is your level of understanding on what the state currently offers to support agriculture, food, and forestry businesses? How do you feel that these programs/offers can be improved?
- What vehicles do you believe would provide the most impactful support (e.g., typical grant or loan program, or other types)?
- Should the state manage these programs, such as through DACF and/or FAME – or are you comfortable with third parties, such as CEI or credit unions or other institutions overseeing these investment opportunities?
- How tolerant do you think the state should be with risk and making investments with public dollars (i.e., investments in businesses, especially agriculture, can be risky because of variables such as weather, crop failure, pests, etc. It's that type of risk that can sometimes cause traditional lenders to deny loans, etc. Hence, is it the role of the state to fill that gap, despite the risk?)?
- What level of participation (e.g., financial contribution or match) should recipients be expected to provide in order to receive state support?
- What reporting/metrics/other information do you feel are needed from recipients of state funds, and/or those who manage the funding programs?

- Are there other individuals you would recommend be interviewed?

Sector Representatives

- In your sector, what are the highest priority capital investment needs?
- What barriers would those investments help overcome?
- What tools do you have to get feedback on priorities or barriers from producers/members in your sector?
- What policy interventions or funding programs have made a positive impact for you and your constituents?
- Who have been effective partners or supporters in your work to advance interests of your sector/industry?
- Are there other individuals you would recommend be interviewed?

Financial Institutions and Capital Providers

- What are the most prevalent types of financial support requested of your institution by agriculture, food, and forestry businesses?
- What types of needs is your institution best equipped to meet?
- What are the primary reasons you have denied support to a business?
- What type of additional financial models do you think would help enhance the current funding landscape for food, farm, or forestry businesses in the state (regardless of whether your institution may/could offer them)? What are they, and how do you think they could be successfully deployed in Maine given the right circumstances?
- Are there other individuals you would recommend be interviewed?