

North Country Growers w/Rep Kuster 8/24/23

\$19.9M B&I loan

\$25M B&I loan

[Salutation]

Thank you, Marguerite (Piret) and Representative Kuster for inviting us to see and learn more about this incredible facility. I am excited to be here in person, as our hard work to make these investments possible takes place in the office—on paper and over the phone and through email—which of course doesn't give us the immersive experience on the ground that we'll enjoy today.

The scope of this operation is truly mind-boggling, and, admittedly, doesn't reflect what most folks have in mind when they think of 'typical' agricultural funding from the USDA. Our investments through the Rural Energy for America Program, or REAP, helps small businesses and farmers save money through energy efficiency and renewable energy. And the Value Added Producer Grant program is designed to help producers and farmers expand their markets through product development and technical assistance. These grants range from four to six figures, and are obligated with the purpose of helping small businesses sustain themselves and grow.

With a \$19.9 million Business & Industry Loan Guarantee from the USDA, North Country Growers is both laying the groundwork for its future corporate success and creating dozens of local jobs that will improve and bolster economic development in Berlin and surrounding areas. This large-scale approach to climate-smart agriculture, and its pioneering efforts to help shape and support New Hampshire's food supply chain of the future, is a shining example for other growers to emulate.

Truly, it is the type of project that we actively seek to support here at the USDA because it checks the boxes that make up the Biden-Harris Administration mission priorities:

- 1- Berlin is beautiful and strong, but deep wounds are still healing. It was once the center of the world in wood pulp and paper; along comes the digital age and now we see a median home income that is less than half that of the state (\$39,479 vs. \$83,449), and a poverty level nearly twice as high (13.9% v 7.2%). This is the kind of community where federal support helps the most. This is where we do our best and most important work.
- 2- By growing an astronomical number of fresh greens and produce each year, North Country Growers can help overcome the bottlenecks and repair the breakdowns within our local and regional food supply chain and distribution networks. Volume alone doesn't solve the bigger issues facing the food supply chain, but it's a huge step in the right direction, toward easier access and lower costs for the consumer.

- 3- With support from the USDA, our Congressional Partners, and the people of Berlin, Marguerite and her team are actively developing new and better markets for commerce to thrive, creating new jobs for residents, and new opportunities for local businesses.

- 4- And they're doing it all with an ethos of environmental sustainability to meet the challenges of climate change head-on.

[Handoff]