



*farm* **to** *plate*  
**ANNUAL REPORT  
2023**



# Table of Contents

- Opening Letter .....1
- By the Numbers .....4
- New England Feeding New England Project .....8
- Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035 .....10
- Using Local Food to Further Health Outcomes and Food Security .....12
- Building Climate Resiliency Through Agroforestry .....14
- Developing the Local Food Retail Supply Chain .....16
- Network Updates .....18
- The Gathering .....20
- About the Network .....22
- About Farm to Plate .....24
- F2P FY23 Financials .....25



# Opening Letter

## To: Vermont General Assembly and Governor Phil Scott

2023 was a historically hard year on Vermont farmers and food businesses. A late spring frost resulted in significant losses for fruit growers, the July floods inundated farm fields of all types, though produce and hay crops were hit especially hard, and global grain shortages due to climate change and the war in Ukraine drove costs of production up for Vermont's organic dairy farms. The July floods also decimated Vermont downtowns and rural communities, with many beloved local restaurants put out of business indefinitely and independent grocers across the state battling flood damages to stores or road closures that made it difficult to keep shelves stocked and food available to local customers.

Through it all, farmers and farmworkers, food business owners and employees, communities, NGOs, and state agencies showed admirable resolve and resilience. But resolve and resilience can be exhausted if we fail to move beyond the mindsets and systems that have given rise to the challenges our farmers, food businesses, and communities face. Which is why more people across Vermont are calling for transformative change to how we think about, plan and design for, and act to address the interconnected challenges of our era—namely climate change, food insecurity, global political instability, economic inequality, and racial inequity.

The call for transformational change is strong within the Farm to Plate Network, evident by the record attendance of 334 people at this year's Annual Gathering which was appropriately themed "Transformative Change." The current of transformative change runs throughout this year's Annual Report, with a focus on Network projects that reveal how the ground is being laid for transformation in different parts of the food system. These project highlights also point to remaining barriers holding back accelerated and scaled transformation in the food system that should be of interest to policymakers, funders, researchers, and food system professionals. Highlighted projects include:

- **The Agroforestry Priority Strategy Team's** work to bring attention to and integrate agroforestry approaches into programming and policy. Agroforestry is a promising climate strategy that offers co-benefits for climate mitigation and adaptation.
- **The Retail Priority Strategy Team's** efforts through the Grocers Project to build the local food retail supply chain and counter the effects of retail and distribution industry consolidation.
- **The CSA and Healthcare Community of Practice's** collaborative approaches to building connection between the food and health sectors to improve food access and health outcomes.
- **The New England Feeding New England project**, and how states in the region are mobilizing together to build a more self-sufficient, resilient, and secure food system in the Northeast.
- **Food Security in Vermont 2035: A Roadmap**, the inclusive process for developing it, the five conditions for achieving food security that will guide implementation of the Roadmap, and implementation steps in 2024 and beyond for the Farm to Plate Network.

The Annual Report also provides a window into other Network activities and collaborations related to farmland access, racial equity, climate change, policy, meat supply chain development, and education, workforce, and labor.

**All of these 2023 projects illuminate the multi-faceted ways we are working together to achieve our collective goals to increase food system economic development, improve the climate resilience of our working landscape and Vermont as a whole, and improve access to healthy local food for all.** We understand as a Network that we will not achieve our goals alone, and transformative change will only come through deep collaboration and alignment across multiple scales—local, state, and federal—within the food system and with adjacent systems (e.g., healthcare, housing, transportation, education). With ongoing support for Farm to Plate from the Legislature and Administration, we believe Vermont has the necessary alignment to accomplish transformational change and reach our shared goals for a viable, resilient, and just and equitable food system. Thank you, and we look forward to our continued work together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jake Claro', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Jake Claro  
Farm to Plate Director  
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund



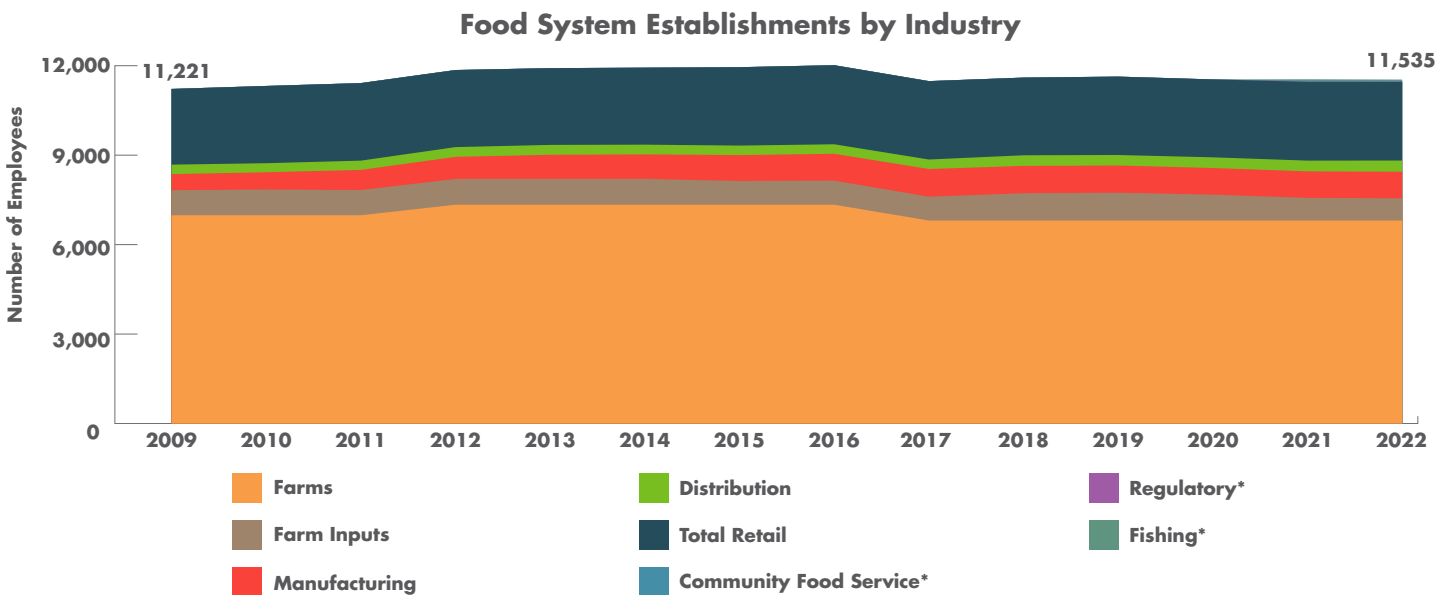
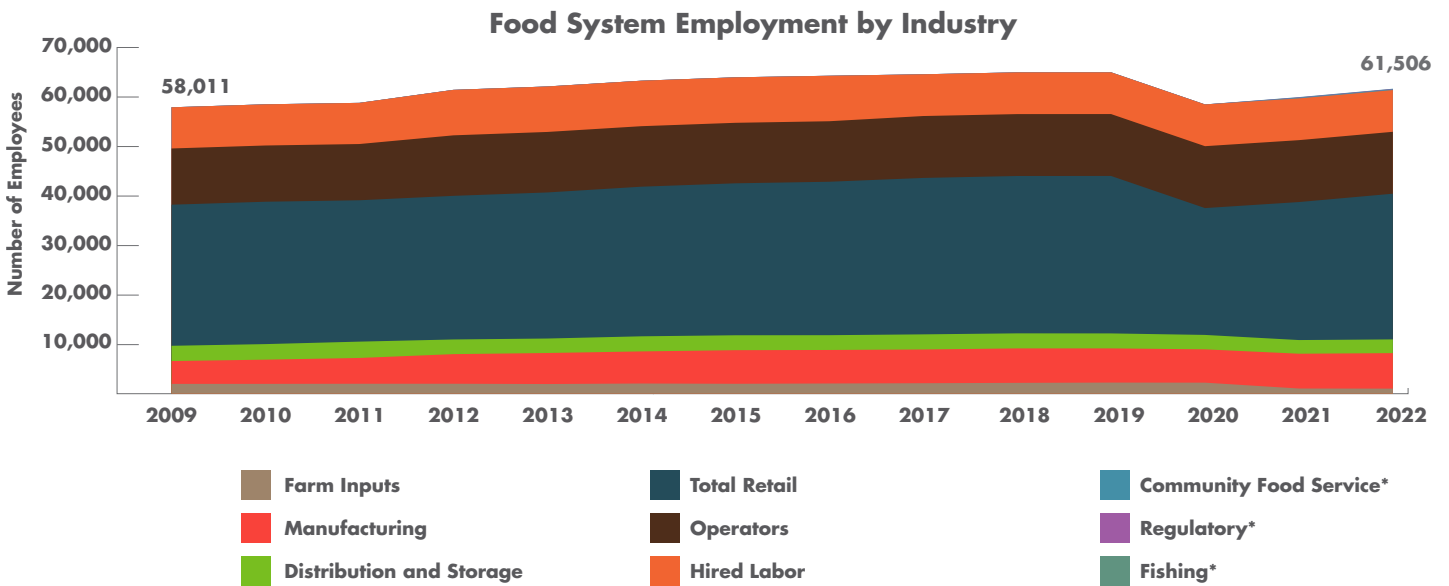
# By the Numbers

Farm to Plate compiles data and creates indicators to understand progress towards the Farm to Plate Investment Program’s legislative outcomes and the [15 Strategic Goals of the 2021-2030 Plan](#). For 2023 we are highlighting data that covers economic development, environmental sustainability and climate resilience, and food access.

## Economic Development

61,506 people are employed in the food system by 11,535 farm and food establishments. Employment in the food system increased by nearly 1,700 jobs (2.8%) in 2023, though total employment is still below pre-pandemic peak employment by about 3,600 jobs.

Vermont’s food system also has a positive employment impact on other sectors of the Vermont economy. Known as the “employment multiplier,” for every job created in the food system an additional 0.8 jobs are created elsewhere in the Vermont economy. When this is taken into account, in total Vermont’s food system employment impact is 110,711 jobs.



\* Note: 2021 was the first year for employment and establishments that Farm to Plate has included data on the Community Food Service, Fishing, and Regulatory categories.

### Food System Employment Multiplier, 2022

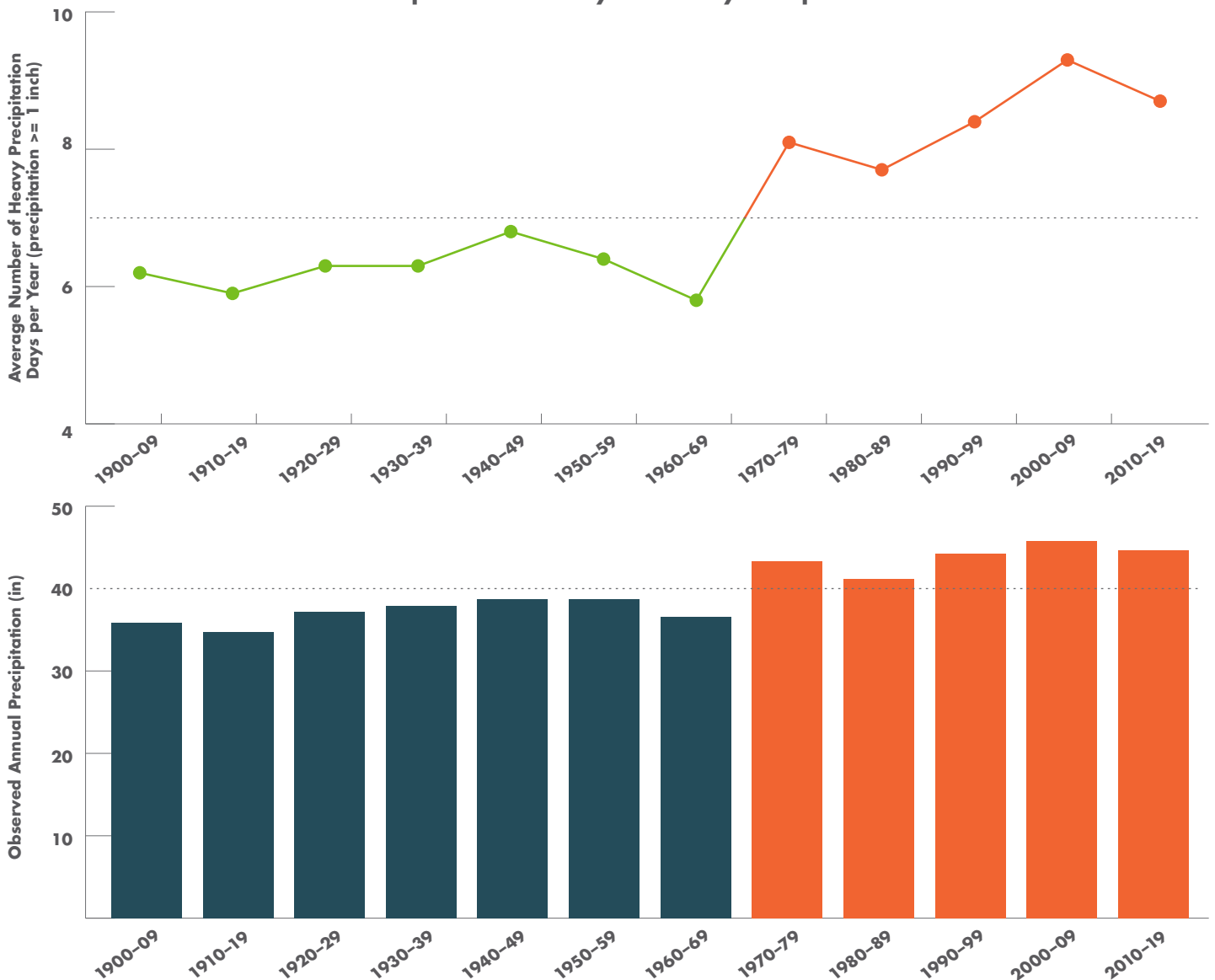


Source: Volume 3: Economic Impact of New England's Food System

## Climate Resilience

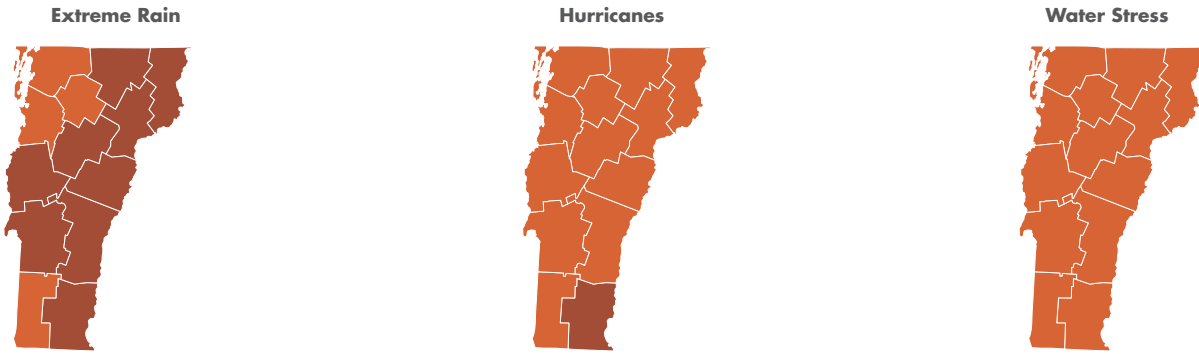
Vermont has experienced for every decade since 1970 more annual precipitation and heavy precipitation events than any prior decade from 1900–1969.

### Annual Precipitation and Days of Heavy Precipitation Since 1900



## Projected Climate Risks by County

Every county in Vermont faces either high or medium climate risks to extreme rain, hurricanes, or water stress (drought).



Annual precipitation and extreme precipitation events in Vermont have been above average in recent years.

Hurricanes Irene (2011), Floyd (1999), and Gloria (1985) were all billion-dollar disasters that impacted Vermont.

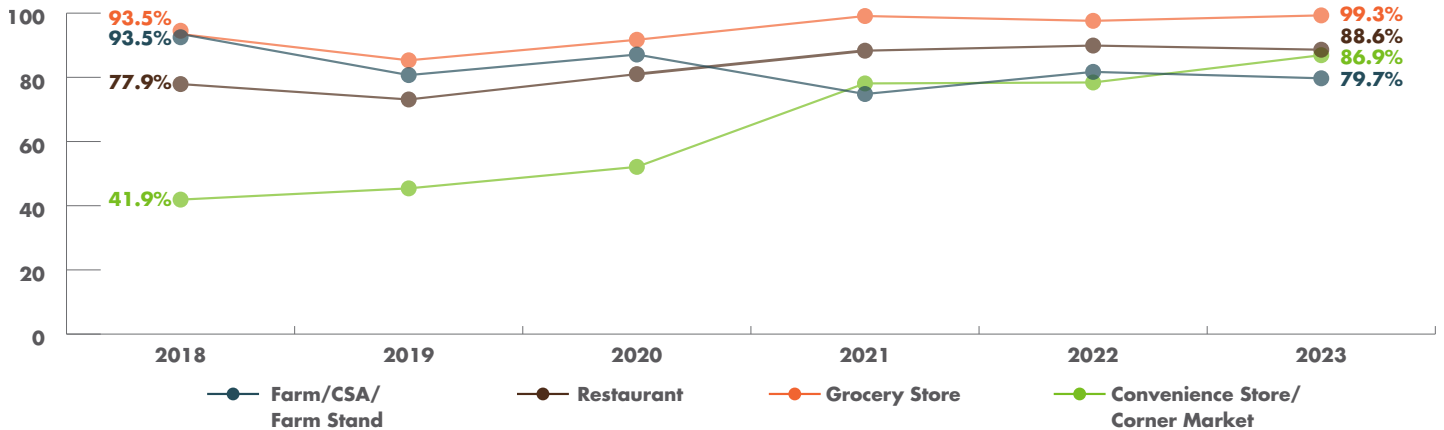
Vermont has experienced more abnormally dry days during the past 10 years than it did in the early 2000s.



Source: Stuart A Thompson and Yarnya Serkez, September 18, 2020, "Every Place Has Its Own Climate Risk. What Is It Where You Live?", *The New York Times*. Based on data from Four Twenty Seven

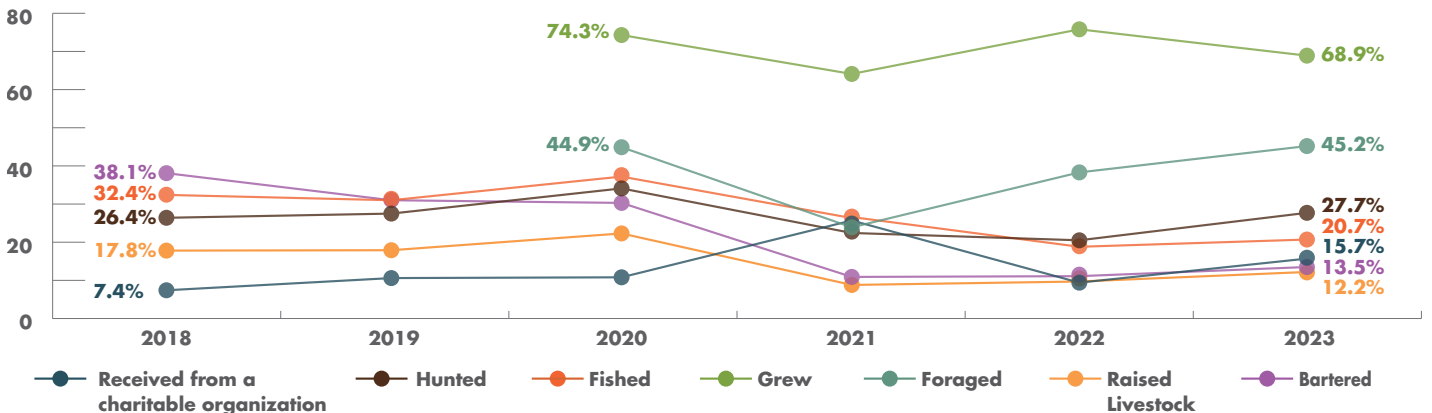
## Food Access

### Percentages of Where Vermonters Purchased Local Food



Source: Vermonter Poll, multiple years

### Percent of Vermonters who Received, Hunted, Fished, Grew, Foraged, or Bartered for Local Food



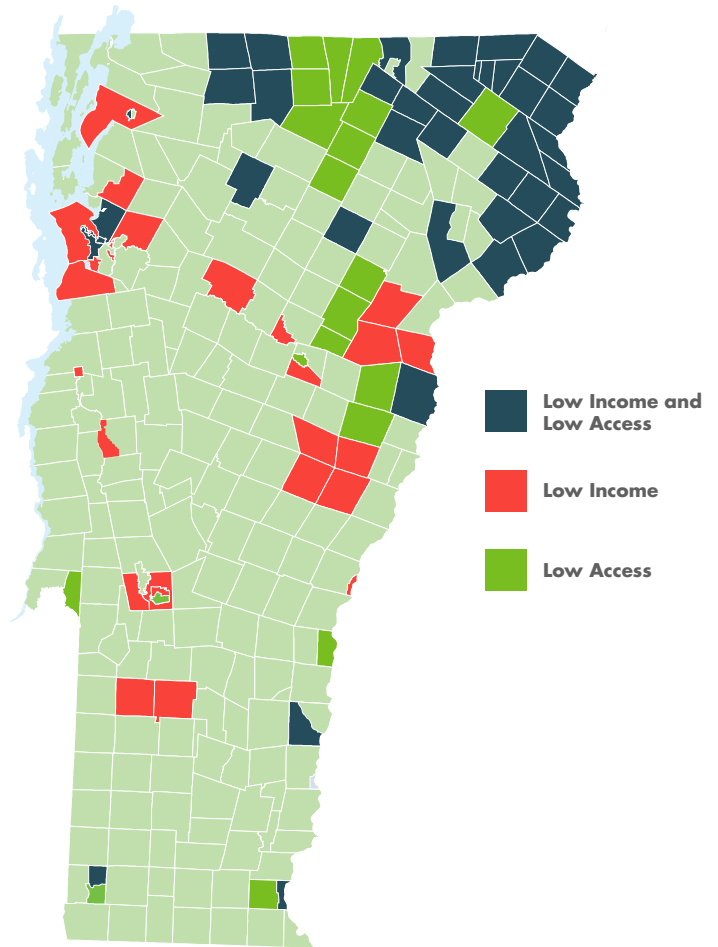
Source: Vermonter Poll, multiple years



## Low Income and Low Food Access in Vermont

Two significant factors that influence the food security of a population are income and the ability to physically access stores that sell food. Each of these factors by themselves can be drivers for food insecurity, but communities that are low income and lack adequate access to food stores are particularly vulnerable. The map on the right displays areas in Vermont where a large proportion of residents are both low-income *and* lack adequate access to nearby food stores, are low-income, or lack adequate access to nearby food stores.

- **Low Income and Access** means: the area has a poverty rate of 20% or higher, or tracts with a median family income less than 80% of median family income for the state or metropolitan area, and a significant number or share of residents are more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest food store.
- **Low Access** means: more than 100 households have no access to a vehicle and are more than 1/2 mile from the nearest supermarket, or a significant number or share of residents are more than 20 miles from the nearest supermarket.
- **Low Income** means: the area has a poverty rate of 20% or higher, or tracts with a median family income less than 80% of median family income for the state or metropolitan area.







# New England Feeding New England Project

The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF) is providing important leadership for a new initiative called New England Feeding New England (NEFNE), aimed at increasing 30% of the food that is produced and consumed in New England by 2030. The initiative aims to unite the food system community across six states to strengthen and grow a climate resilient, equitable, regional food system.

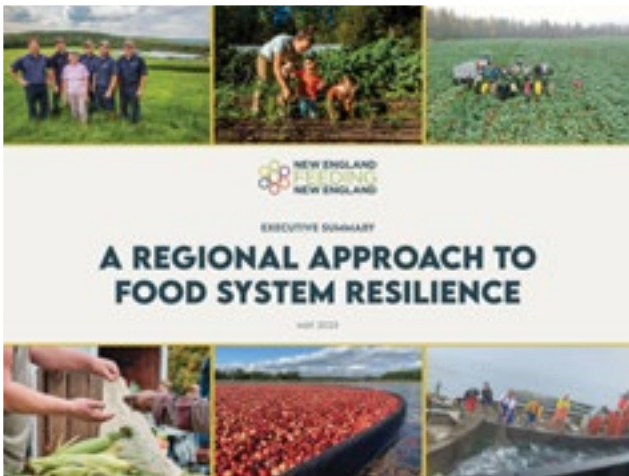
In June 2023, the New England Food System Planners Partnership, which initiated the NEFNE project, released its report, A Regional Approach to Food System Resilience outlining what it will take for the New England states to provide 30% of its food by 2030. The seven-part report is intended to help policy-makers, funders, food system businesses and stakeholders, community groups, and consumers understand the relative resilience of New England's food system and plan for the future.

During 2023, sixteen researchers from around the region:

- Calculated the economic impact (sales and jobs) of New England's food system
- Explored current eating patterns and considered what a regionally resilient eating pattern would involve
- Conducted a regional self-reliance assessment of our current land and sea-based production in the region, and
- Calculated production increases that would be required to achieve the 30% goal and considered what changes to existing market channels will need to occur in order to achieve our regional goal.

The goal of 30% by 2030 has been endorsed by the Agriculture Department Commissioners in each of the six New England states. In addition, individual state briefs highlighting the opportunities available and challenges that will be faced as each of the New England states works to contribute to achieving this ambitious regional goal. To help manage this project, The Partnership hired Leah Rovner as its Project Director. Because the VSJF serves as the fiscal sponsor of this project, Leah is considered an employee of our organization.

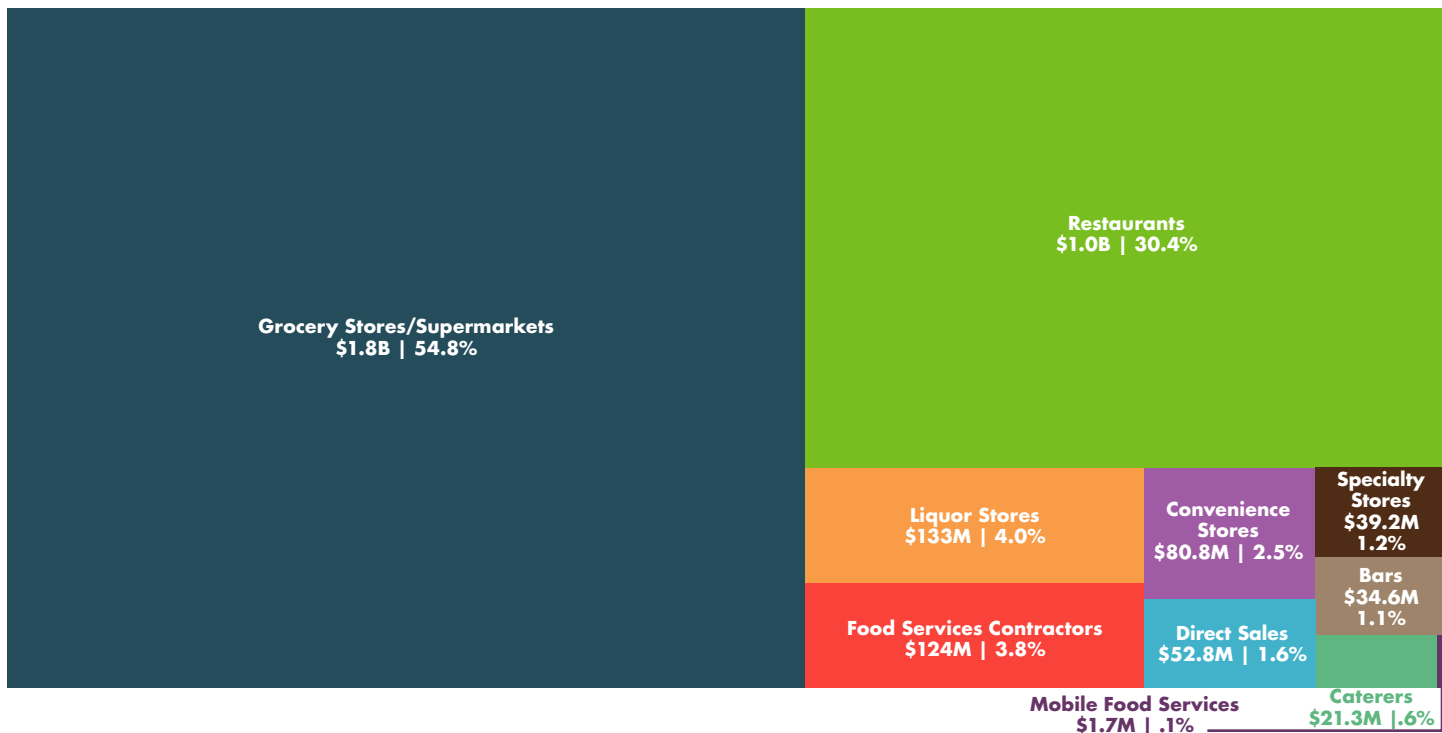
Vermont's Agriculture and Food Systems Strategic Plan 2021–2030 is very much in alignment with this regional project. Farm to Plate has led the way for food system planning efforts across the country with a laser focus on the power of networks to transform systems. The Farm to Plate Network has already built a strong business services, technical assistance, and financing support system for small and midsize producers, processors, and food system businesses. We've continued to make significant investments in long-term food production, increasing the viability of local farms and food businesses, and protecting and preserving agricultural



### Food Stores and Service Sales, 2017

#### How much do Vermonters spend on food? Where do they shop?

Vermonters spent over \$3.3 billion at stores and restaurants in 2017. Grocery stores (56.2%) and restaurants (30.6%)—which includes full-service and fast food restaurants—accounted for 86.8% of total sales. Direct sales from farmer to customer made up 1.6% of total retail sales, the highest percent in New England.



land. What we know from the NEFNE report is that our state will have an outsized role to play in increasing production of food that can be sold throughout the region. To reach more consumers with our locally produced food, we will need to increase the number of acres in agricultural production (which also includes more efforts are need around farmland protection) and we will need to open up more regional wholesale market outlets to our products.

As we saw from the flooding that impacted at least 27,000 acres of farmland across the state, Vermont agriculture will also have to continue to contend with and adapt to climate induced events.

Find the Report here: [nefoodsystemplanners.org/projects/report-components/](http://nefoodsystemplanners.org/projects/report-components/)





## Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035

We are proud to announce that the [Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035](#) has been completed and is now ready for implementation. The Farm to Plate Network’s Food Security Priority Strategy Team worked with over 600 Vermonters: Network members and people who contributed their personal expertise on food security to develop the Roadmap over the past two years. Now that the roadmap is completed and presented to the Vermont Legislature, we are excited to begin implementation. The Roadmap shows us how to ensure everyone in Vermont has the food they need to create resilient, climate-ready communities across the state.

Food insecurity has been rising since the Covid-19 pandemic and remains at pre-pandemic levels today. Exacerbated by recent climate disasters such as the July 2023 flooding, food insecurity remains a problem that needs immediate attention. Until now, there has been no coordinated or comprehensive effort to plan for the impacts of climate and pandemic-induced emergencies on Vermont’s food supply and shared food security. Recognizing this, the Roadmap project was initiated as part of the 2021–2030 Farm to Plate Strategic Plan to improve access to healthy local food for all Vermonters and [Priority Strategy #24](#), the creation of a food security plan.

### Roadmap Development

From the beginning, the Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035 has been built on the foundation of community stakeholder input. For the past two years, we have gathered insight from across Vermont, with approximately 600 Vermont residents of all walks of life contributing their experience, expertise, and opinions about how to create a food secure Vermont.

Farm to Plate members and others gathered statewide feedback through formal research, individual interviews, focus groups, and an online survey.



Food Security PST members analyzed the feedback and from this developed goals, objectives, and strategies to create food security. Community stakeholders generally believe that Vermont has the tools, knowledge, and resources to ensure that every person living here has the food they want and need to be healthy and nourished. We know we are not starting from scratch. To achieve food security for those living in Vermont by 2035, five conditions will need to be present:

1. Implementing the Roadmap must be well coordinated, highly collaborative, and focused on ensuring equity at every step in the process;
2. A demonstrated commitment to ensuring food security for all must exist among our elected officials and state government personnel;
3. All employers (business, government, nonprofit organizations) have a role to play in ensuring food security for their employees (e.g., by providing livable wage and benefits);
4. Communities must have the tools they need to support food security; and
5. Vermont farmers and food producers must have the resources necessary to provide a resilient food supply.

The Roadmap, released in January 2024, provides goals, objectives and strategies to create the conditions above. It provides

“People aren’t hungry only because of inadequate food access programs. The more we create programs, the more we build systems that rely on the current inequity we have. But at the same time, I think these programs are amazing. Everything just has to be happening at the same time—emergency services, and longer-term sustainable change.”

### Stakeholder Feedback

determination, we know that the model will involve clear and transparent decision-making processes, compensation for leadership and grassroots participants, and a regular channel of communication between those leaders and organizations working at a statewide and Network-wide level, and individuals and organizations operating at a regional and grassroots level in Vermont’s communities.

### Takeaways and Next Steps

Together, we can work to ensure that hidden hunger does not exist in Vermont because everyone has the food they need. If you’re interested in becoming involved in this work, you can sign up for the Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035 newsletter on the [Farm to Plate website](#). You can also join your local Hunger Council; find out more at the [Hunger Free Vermont website](#).

implementable, actionable items that will guide the state through 2035. Many are already underway, including high priority policy items, essential funding for supplemental nutrition programs, and support for our agricultural producers.

The Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035 Coalition is housed within the Farm to Plate Network and built upon the high level of trust, collaboration, and coordination that already exists within the Farm to Plate Network. Though the governance and leadership model will be determined in 2024 through collective discussion and





## Using Local Food to Further Health Outcomes and Food Security

One of the central goals of the Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan is “Improving access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.” Although much of the work done across the Farm to Plate Network aligns with this goal, perhaps no other group better brings together the food access and health sectors as the CSA and Healthcare Community of Practice (CoP).

The [CSA and Healthcare CoP](#) includes professionals and practitioners to better connect on how Food as Medicine programs can help to facilitate enhanced care for patients. These typically seasonal programs provide patients identified as “food insecure” by medical providers with a CSA share to help supplement their diet with a healthy dose of locally grown and produced foods.

Food as Medicine also has many points in common with evidence-based health programs used outside of Vermont, creating a context for learning from national and regional groups. Apart from improving patients’ health outcomes and food security, these programs provide local farmers with a consistent and reliable revenue stream during their growing season.

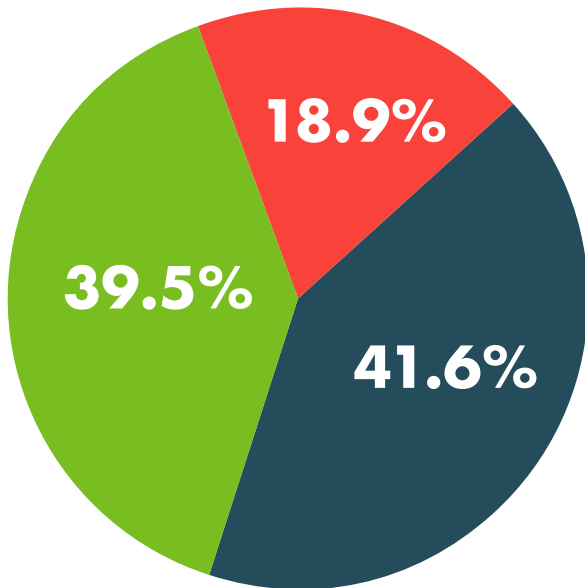
“The program has given me the freedom to experiment with different fruits and vegetables that I, most likely, would not have tried otherwise. [The farmers and staff] have been patient with all of my questions and very informative. My refrigerator is stocked with fresh foods (instead of packaged food) and I am not craving the foods that are not as good for me. The program is fantastic!”

**2022 University of Vermont Medical Center Farm Shares for Health Participant**



## 2023 Vermonter Poll

If there was a Food as Medicine program available in your community, would you be interested in participating?



**39.5%** Yes, I would be interested in participating in a Food As Medicine program in my community

**18.9%** No, I would not be interested in participating in a Food as Medicine program

**41.6%** Unsure/need more information

To better relay the impact and breadth of Food as Medicine programs in Vermont, the CSA and Healthcare CoP decided to gather data across programs participating in this team:

- Healthy Roots Collaborative and NOTCH: Northwest Farmacy CSA
- University of Vermont's Farm Shares for Health
- ACORN's Farmacy: Food Is Medicine
- Vermont Youth Conservation Corps' Health Care Share
- Vermont Farmers Food Center's Farmacy Project

The resulting document, [2022 Data Report: Farm to Plate CSA and Healthcare Community of Practice](#), provides useful information and tells a story of collective impact for eaters, growers and healthcare professionals alike.

- 1,841 people reached based on household size
- \$119,212 of local food purchased
- 670+ volunteer hours to support programs
- 26 total participating farms
- 46 participating healthcare clinics
- 75% of participants screened positive for food insecurity
- Average annual household income for participants is \$10,000 to \$26,000



For healthcare clinics and community organizations interested in replicating the Food as Medicine model, it provides a useful framework that outlines the benefits of such programs.

Participants, farmers, and community partners alike note an important secondary impact: Food as Medicine programs create connections across communities and populations, many of which are often left outside of the local food marketplace due to cost, lack of transportation and other limiting factors. While picking up their CSA shares, participants may learn new methods for preparing foods, sample recipes, and develop relationships through meeting farmers, volunteers and neighbors. All this serves to strengthen agricultural literacy and the social network so essential to our food system.

Of the Food as Medicine participants surveyed, cost was reported as the #1 barrier to purchasing vegetables. Dedicating more funding, especially to regions of the state without such programs such as the Northeast Kingdom and southern Vermont, would help to enhance food security and provide a treatment method that supplements often expensive medical treatments and prescriptions.



## Building Climate Resiliency Through Agroforestry

Farm to Plate encourages Network members to develop new strategies that address urgent environmental issues through shared dialogue, co-learning and action. Goal category 2, “Environmental Sustainability”, provides the broader context while more specific priority strategies lay the groundwork for the expansion of innovative climate change adaptation practices.

Agroforestry is the intentional integration of trees and perennial plants into an agricultural landscape. Recognizing the need to expand innovative climate adaptation approaches, the [Agroforestry Priority Strategy Team \(PST\)](#) took on two projects in 2022–2023. The first was intended to expand existing knowledge of agroforestry as an important climate change mitigation strategy, and the second was focused on providing useful information to technical assistance providers, farmers, and distributors looking to put agroforestry related practices into action.

Agroforestry has increasingly been seen as an important strategy for addressing climate change, expanding and diversifying farm

“It hasn’t been that long that trees have been removed from agricultural landscapes . . . [agroforestry] is the way that humans have grown food throughout time, up until perhaps 200 years ago. So it’s not anything new—it’s basically just a modern reinterpretation of the way that people have found of tending to a place and meeting their needs.”

**Mark Krawczyk**  
Co-owner and Farmer,  
Valley Clayplain Forest Farm in New Haven, VT

production, and contributing to greater agricultural resiliency. While one of the smallest states, Vermont has the highest percentage of farms that are practicing agroforestry in the US. Yet there is a lack of resources available for both farmers hoping to incorporate agroforestry related practices and technical assistance providers alike. Of the resources that are available,

many are regionally or even nationally focused and do not recognize both the benefits and limitations of Vermont’s specific climate zone. There are ample opportunities for expansion through education, outreach and expanded utilization of agroforestry related species. The high degree of participation in monthly meetings for this PST reflects the continued and expanding interest in this topic.



## Agroforestry Storytelling and Mapping Project

This project was born out of the Agroforestry PST's aim to enhance awareness of agroforestry by sharing the stories of agroforestry farmers in the state and showcasing the many farmers that are practicing agroforestry through an interactive story map. Farm to Plate partnered with a UVM Food Systems graduate student who completed 5 interviews with Vermont farms. Each profile provides a unique experience of the many approaches and benefits of diversifying agricultural production and landscapes. In addition, there is an online map of current agroforestry practitioners that will be updated over time.

## Agroforestry Species Project

Based on feedback from the Agroforestry PST, Farm to Plate hired a consultant to create a "quick reference" list of commonly used species adaptable to the Vermont climate, and a working spreadsheet of geographically preferred agroforestry species. Starting in July 2023, information was gathered through reviewing existing resources, 10 in-depth interviews with service providers and farmers, and data gathered by 24 survey responses from growers, farmers and technical assistance providers.



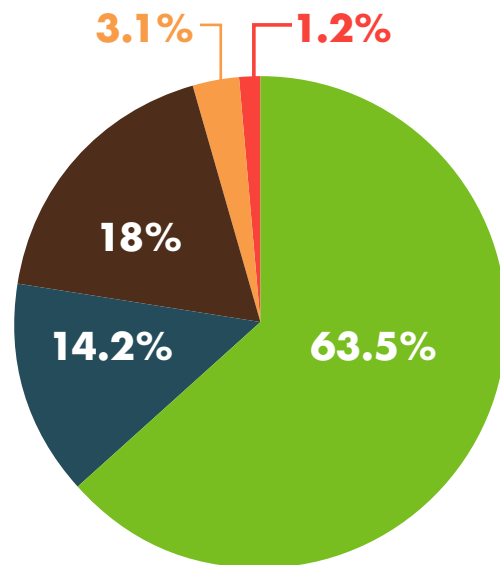
The results describe the species' potential for a wide variety of agroforestry uses and needs, considering factors such as emerging markets, function for conservation, hardiness, feed and fodder, nutrition, and cost. In response to the flooding that occurred in July 2023, flood resilient species were added as an additional important consideration. This spreadsheet will function as a "working document" that the Agroforestry PST will continue to amend and build upon as the climate continues to change and knowledge expands.

## Collaborative Learning

The Agroforestry PST functions as a space for both action and co-learning with participation from farmers, technical assistance providers and researchers. This year, members of the team facilitated a session at the Farm to Plate Annual Gathering and also organized a site visit to Flag Hill Farm, a cidery featuring silvopasture and other agroforestry practices owned and operated by Sabra Ewing and Sebastian Lousada.

## 2023 Vermonter Poll

### Vermonters Familiar with the Term "Agroforestry"



**63.5%** I have never heard the term agroforestry, nor am I familiar with the example practices listed

**14.2%** I have never heard the term agroforestry, but I am familiar with the example practices listed

**18%** I am familiar with the term "agroforestry" and its meaning

**3.1%** I have an in-depth understanding of agroforestry and its practices

**1.2%** I have an in-depth understanding of agroforestry and I manage agricultural or forest land using agroforestry practices





## Developing the Local Food Retail Supply Chain

Vermont's locally owned and operated food businesses, from farms, to food processors, to distributors, to retailers, are the heart and soul of our rural economy. But, getting local food to retail grocery markets, and effectively marketing and selling local food once it reaches the store is a complicated endeavor that many of our self-operated or small food businesses need help with. The Grocer's Project addresses the complexities of the retail market channel in an ever-changing landscape (from pandemics, to accelerated industry consolidation, to natural disasters fueled by climate change), with industry relevant and impactful retail services to producer, distributors, and retailers.

In 2023, the [Grocer's Project](#) continued its multi-pronged approach of technical assistance (TA) for farm and food businesses involved in the retail grocery supply chain. Through cohort TA and peer learning, one-on-one technical assistance, intensive workshops, and information sharing on local retail trends and opportunities the project has successfully cultivated supply chain business connections in the retail grocery market and supporting integration of local food into Vermont independent grocery stores.

### Food Producer and Farmer Cohort Retail Trainings

**Thirty-three farm and food businesses received retail and wholesale technical assistance.** Over 11 weeks, from January to March 2023, two cohorts—one made up of food manufacturers and value-added producers with an interest in increasing retail wholesale sales, and one for farmers with direct-to-customer retail

stores interested in learning how to think like a retailer—received training and technical assistance.

The food manufacturing cohort received training on:

- Ins and outs of selling to retailers, including creating the operational systems to do so successfully, and understanding and leveraging what store or distributor buyers consider when making choices to onboard new vendors
- Developing a brand strategy
- Calculating margins and cost of goods sold
- How to evaluate readiness and fit for different distribution options

The “farmer as retailer” cohort focused on:

- Managing product selection to achieve profitability and serve customer needs
- Effective merchandising and signage
- Product promotion and pricing
- Creating engaging experiences for customers
- Sourcing and working with distributors to bring in other local products

In addition to the specific training topics and drawing on outside experts, the cohort approach cultivated B2B engagement and peer learning from participants, with opportunities to learn from operations at different scales and years of business experience. For the farmer as retailer cohort, several farmers with successful and mature farm stores and farmstands shared their expertise and experiences, providing real world examples to draw from and be inspired by.

## Food Grocery Store Technical Assistance

Independent Vermont grocery stores and co-ops received a variety of technical services throughout 2023 that focused on how stores can purchase and market local food to improve their operations and viability. Services included:

- **One-on-one technical assistance to 12 stores and 6 distributors to increase local food purchasing.** Consultations with stores and distributors involved in-person TA and utilization of a local food wholesale producer-distributor catalogue. The catalogue, which to date features over 825 local food vendors, has allowed distributors and retailers to identify local producers by product category that are wholesale ready and available for them to buy. **Main Street Market in Richford**, for example, has utilized the catalogue to identify and purchase local products that fulfill its health and wellness mission. In addition to retailers using the catalogue, it has been of value in making product referrals to distributors. For example, **Associated Buyers**, a natural and local foods distributor, has asked about local wholesale ready products within certain categories and quickly received referrals for local food businesses that fit their needs and are ready to be onboarded for wholesale.
- **Point of sale (POS) system technical assistance and local product review provided to six co-ops and independent stores.** When a POS system is well-managed it can be the center of decision making for inventory management, using data to drive sales and evaluate profitability. The goal was to use the review of local products as defined by VT ACT 129 to help store’s understand how their POS systems could be utilized to improve inventory management and profitability. The POS training uncovered critical challenges facing independent retailers. First, high turnover rates with staff

“From brand strategy, to cost of goods sold, to evaluating distribution, this was an exceptional opportunity to gain knowledge about managing business growth with a diverse group of food producers. The program is greatly appreciated and truly a valuable resource to Vermont food businesses.”

**Alyssa Stewart**  
Stewart Maple

significantly impacts a stores ability to effectively implement and utilize POS systems and data for local purchasing, and the July flooding further compounded stores’ ability to be staffed or take on projects beyond finding ways to reopen or rebuild. Second, while local food counts in each store provided insights on gaps and growth opportunities of Vermont products, the work revealed that stores are under pressure to meet distributor minimums and receive purchasing volume discounts from large national distributors.

These purchasing minimums and volume discounts incentivize stores to stock products that are often not from Vermont. This can often translate to a disconnect between a store’s mission to support local farmers and food manufacturers.

• **12 independent retail stores (18 employees in total) participated in a day-long intensive training on November 8th with nationally renowned food retail experts Jeanie Wells and James Morrell.**

The training was the first of its kind adaptation of Wells’ Mighty Community Market training

program, which won the Innovation and Achievement award at the 2023 Consumer Cooperative Management Association’s annual conference. The training focused on:

- » How to grow sales through partnering with and featuring local producers
- » How to use data to drive product mix and pricing decisions
- » How to use tried and true merchandising techniques to spotlight the store’s values, and
- » How to create a welcoming shopping experience and grow sales.

Attendees left with goals that will be the basis for follow-up technical assistance focused on implementation of lessons learned. 100% of attendees said the training met or exceeded their expectations, and 100% of attendees said they would attend future workshops. More short courses are being planned for the upcoming year to complement other services and technical assistance offered through the Grocers project in 2024.

“Annie Harlow, Grocer Project consultant, and the Farm to Plate team are invaluable assets to producers and growers in Vermont-my business has benefited so much from their work and I feel so lucky we have them on our team.”

**Jess Messer**  
Savoure



# Network Updates



Our 2023 projects and collaboration advanced Vermont’s food system. The following highlights a selection of the Network’s efforts from 2023 and what we’re looking forward to in 2024.

## **Financing for Farmland Access Priority Strategy Team**

With competing pressures from development, migration and climate change, the need to secure Vermont’s agricultural land base is increasingly evident. That said, for farmers—in particular BIPOC, and new and beginning farmers—the ability to access land is limited by strenuous application requirements, cost, and historical and structural racism. This year, this team entered an intensive inquiry process inviting guest speakers, including lenders, to provide details on crosscutting features of inclusive capital and land access programs. The findings from this inquiry phase will guide the future work of this group.

## **Education, Workforce and Labor Topic Exchange**

Leaders of this topic exchange bring together voices from the private sector, youth programs, technical and higher education to discuss how we can best align efforts around the state. Although agricultural training programs do exist in both secondary and higher education, enrollment is faltering and learning and training opportunities often do not reflect the needs of employers. In 2024, this group plans to publish an updated version of the Exploring Food Systems Career Guide and also organize conversations tied to the importance of maintaining agricultural training programs at Vermont State University and other institutions.

## **Racial Equity Plan Priority Strategy Team**

Over the course of summer 2022 to April 2023, 21 interviews and two meetings were held to develop a workplan for the team. Results were summarized and released in the [Vermont Farm to Plate Racial Equity Report: Findings and Next Steps to Improve Racial Equity in the Vermont Food System](#), which identified the following five areas of activity that will guide the work of the team:

- Define and collect relevant data about racial equity in order to set clear and measurable targets for the state and food system in Vermont.
- Create an assets “map” of people and organizations working on racial equity issues in VT with a focus on agriculture-related work.
- Set meaningful and measurable racial equity objectives for the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (F2P backbone organization), the F2P Network including the Racial Equity Priority Strategy Team, and willing partners.
- Use the group to develop a community of practice for improving racial equity in the food system.
- Identify specific racial equity training needs and opportunities.

The leadership team is in the process of forming and will be organizing the group to work on these five areas of activity in the coming years.



## Meat Supply Chain Priority Strategy Team

The first phase of the Beef on Dairy project was completed, which resulted in the successful crossbreeding of 100 animals, an agreement with a Vermont slaughterhouse to slaughter and process into sub-primals at an affordable rate, an agreement with a livestock broker to pay a floor price with a premium above conventional prices for loads sent in 2025, brand development with Place Creative Team and initial brand testing and surveying in Boston, and the creation of a website with online ordering. Six dairy farms, two processors, two retailers, and one livestock broker are currently actively engaged in the project, with the aim to engage 5–7 more farms and 8–10 retail buyers.

Farms are receiving technical assistance on genetic selection and feed protocols, executive business skills including cost or production analysis and recordkeeping, and marketing skills that include market identification, branding, merchandising, and understanding how to enhance value for brokers, processors, retailers, distributors, and consumers. In the next year the project will focus on benchmarking costs of production, market development in metro areas with small grocers, independent butchers, and restaurants, recruitment of new farms, and developing a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) incentive program for farm participants.

## Policy Priority Strategy Team

During the 2023 legislative session, the Policy Team checked in on a weekly basis to stay informed on key legislative developments, track priority legislation and coordinate advocacy responses as needed, and shape legislative priorities for the upcoming year. For 2024, the Policy Team has identified a number of appropriation and regulatory priorities that would aid the implementation of Priority Strategies and achievement of Strategic Goals of the 2021–2030 Strategic Plan.

## Agricultural Literacy Priority Strategy Team

As the agricultural landscape shifts in Vermont, this team is reflecting on how this impacts collective understanding of the

importance of our state’s farming communities and consequently, behaviors. Can we anticipate whether greater agricultural literacy will, for example, impact an individual’s purchasing habits, likelihood to pursue an agriculturally based career, or support of policies tied to our state’s farming communities? This group is looking at the impact of “touch points”—the various experiences and interactions individuals have that connect them with the food system. The team recently issued a [report exploring these topics](#) based on a network analysis of efforts in Vermont and beyond, and 26 in-depth interviews. Moving forward, this team will use this fact-finding effort to inform the expansion of food systems related education.

## Climate Soil & Environment Topic Exchange

This topic exchange is focused on building connections between food system resilience and state climate policy and action. Currently, climate action and policy in Vermont is largely segmented between mitigation on one hand and resilience and adaptation on the other, with greater policy focus on mitigation. The role of agriculture for Vermont’s climate policy and actions as a result is not well understood, discounted, or taken for granted. For 2024 the group plans to identify and recommend solutions, strategies and policy that can meet the need for adaptation and resilience action in Vermont by creating opportunities for collaboration and coordination.

## Land Access and Land Use Topic Exchange

Reflective of other topic exchanges, this group focuses on building connections, fostering relationships and developing understanding of complex issues. This past June, the exchange met at Lareau Farm in Waitsfield for a discussion on the intersection of the housing crisis and land access for farm employers and employees. In October, leaders of this group organized a joint meeting with the Food Security Topic Exchange to explore the correlation between land and food access, and how we can organize within communities to support equitable access to both.

# What Does Agricultural Literacy Look Like?



## Agricultural Literacy Strengthens:

-   
**Local Food Economy**
-   
**Nutrition and Health Outcomes**
-   
**Support for Ag Related Policies and Initiatives**
-   
**Support for Regenerative Agriculture and Sustainable Food Production**
-   
**Educational Engagement and Workforce Development**

# The Gathering

November 16-17, 2023



“Transformative Change” was undoubtedly a timely theme for the 13th Annual Farm to Plate Gathering. Over 300 attendees including network members, session facilitators and presenters showed up bravely and took on complex issues impacting Vermonters, farms, and our local and global communities. As one network member stated, “Many relationships were strengthened, rekindled, or newly made.”

Our reflections and conversations with many of you following this year’s event are reflected in this feedback from one attendee: “We look forward to continuing the good fight of trying to change our failing systems bit by bit, and appreciation knowing that there are so many working in our food system that feel the same way and are trying hard to in this small but mighty state.”



“Great appreciation to all at VSJF who did so much to make this the integrity-filled and inspirational event that it was. I can say with confidence the system is different today than it was before the Gathering.”

2023 Gathering Attendee



"I have been struggling to articulate changes and transitions I would like to make in my farm-based education work and this has been such a revitalization of purpose and strategic planning. Navigating the farm workforce and providing an educational internship has a steep learning curve that many aspects of the conference helped me process."

2023 Gathering Attendee

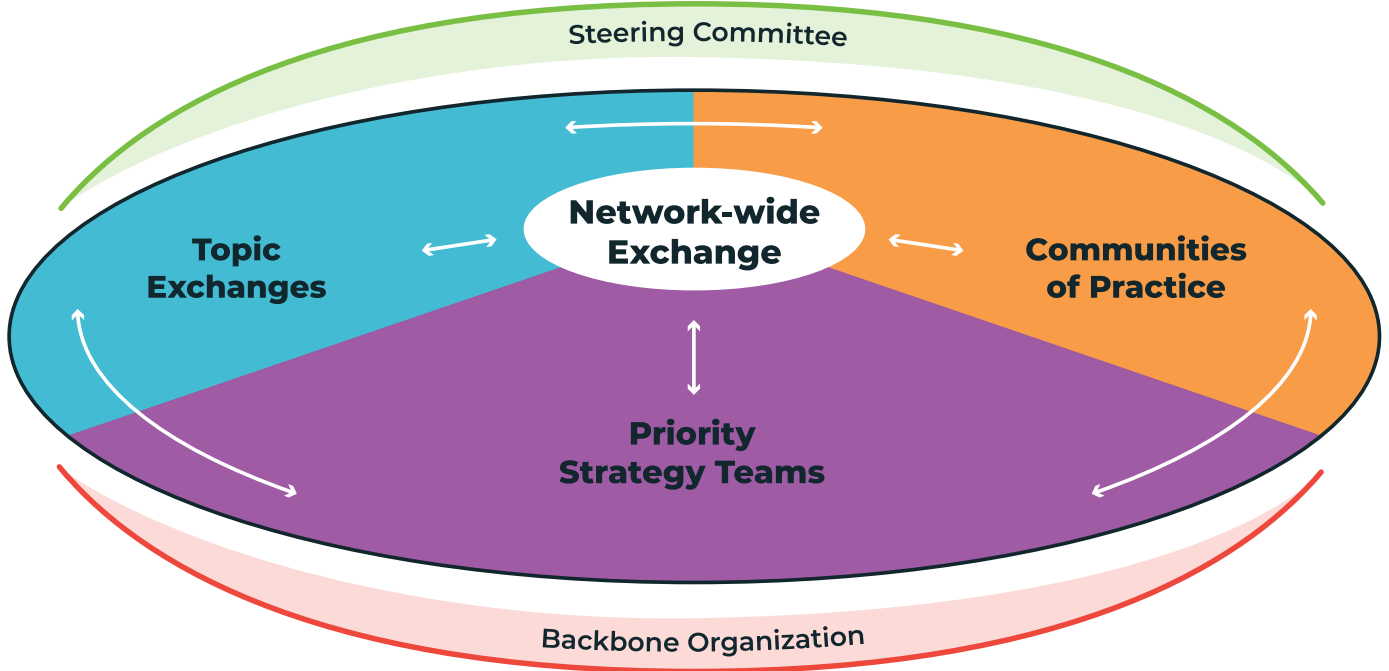


"Simply the premiere farm and food networking event in Vermont and New England. Makes a huge difference for our business and for Vermonters. The networking and learning that happened has the potential to impact us for the next 5 years."

2023 Gathering Attendee



# About the Network



The Farm to Plate Network is made up of 350+ farm and food system businesses, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, funders and capital providers, and government agencies working collectively to implement the 15 Strategic Goals of Vermont’s 2021–2030 food system plan, as well as advancing organizational goals of members. Priority Strategy Teams (PST), Topic Exchanges (TE), and Communities of Practice (CoP) convene to work on high impact projects that no one organization can do alone to relocalize the food system, as well as assess gaps, opportunities, trends, and monitor progress towards reaching Vermont’s Strategic Goals.

## Farm to Plate Network Leadership

Shared leadership provides overall network governance and guidance for the Farm to Plate Network. Network group curators and the Steering Committee are responsible for facilitating connection, alignment, and implementation of goals and priority strategies, developing processes for learning, helping organize the annual Farm to Plate Network Gathering, and shaping the evolution of the Network over time.

## 2023 Steering Committee Members

Organization/Business	Name
Hunger Free VT	Lechelle-Antonia Gray
VAAFM	Ari-Rockland Miller
Saint Michael’s College	Kristyn Achilich
VAAFM	Abbey Willard
NOFA-VT	Helen Rortvedt
NOFA-VT Designated Alternate	Erin Buckwalter
Rural Vermont	Graham Unangst-Rufenacht
Rural Vermont Designated Alternate	Caroline Gordon
Shelburne Farms	Betsy Rosenbluth
Vermont Way Foods	Matt Landi
Vermont Releaf Collective	Samantha Langevin
Vermont Releaf Collective Designated Alternate	Jennifer Morton-Dow
USDA	Joshua Allen
Green Acres Homestead	Mark Montalban
Radiance Studios LLC and Vermont Womenpreneurs	Mieko Ozeki
Vermont Youth Conservation Corps	Susie Walsh-Daloz



## List of Network Groups by Group Type

### Priority Strategy Teams

- Vermont Food Security Plan Team
- Meat Supply Chain Team
- Agroforestry Team
- Retail Grocers Team
- Policy Team
- Aggregation, Distribution, & Storage Infrastructure Team
- Racial Equity Action Plan Team
- Food/Ag Literacy Team
- Financing for Farmland Access Team

### Communities of Practice

- Agritourism
- CSA and Healthcare
- Farm Viability Indicators
- Food Cycle Coalition

### Topic Exchanges

- Production, Processing, & Market Development
- Education, Workforce, & Labor
- Food Security
- Land Access and Land Use
- Climate, Soil, & Environment

### Priority Strategy Team Leadership

Aaron Gunman	NOFA-VT	Agroforestry PST
Jennifer Byrne	White River Natural Resources Conservation District	Agroforestry PST
Eric DeLuca	Leverage Point Consulting	Financing for Farmland Access PST
Annie Harlow	Annie Harlow Consulting	Retail Grocers PST
Becka Warren	VSJF	Food Security Plan PST

### Communities of Practice Leadership

Tara Pereira	Vermont Fresh Network	Agritourism COP
Lisa Chase	UVM Extension	Agritourism COP
Natasha Duarte	Composting Association of Vermont	Food Cycle COP
Emma Hileman	Vermont Farmers Foodcenter	Healthcare/CSA COP
Heidi Lynch	Vermont Farmers Foodcenter	Healthcare/CSA COP

### Topic Exchanges Leadership

Lena Greenburg	Intervale Center	Food Security TE
Lechelle-Antonia Gray	Hunger Free Vermont	Food Security TE
Carissa Brewton	Vermont Law School (student)	Food Security TE
Whitney Shields	American Farmland Trust	Food Security TE
Liz Kenton	UVM Extension	Ed, Workforce, and Labor TE
Vic Izzo	UVM Institute for Agroecology	Ed, Workforce, and Labor TE
Kathy Lavoie	Northwest Regional Planning Commission	Ed, Workforce, and Labor TE
Kristyn Achilich	Saint Michael's College	Ed, Workforce, and Labor TE
Abbie Corse	Corse Family Farm	Climate, Soil, & Environment TE
Alissa White	American Farmland Trust	Climate, Soil, & Environment TE
Joshua Faulkner	UVM Extension	Climate, Soil, & Environment TE
Alex DePillis	VAAFM	Climate, Soil, & Environment TE
Susan Alexander	LRSWMD	Climate, Soil, & Environment TE
Sarah Danly	White River Valley Consortium-Vital Communities	Land Access and Land Use TE
Ari Rockland-Miller	VAAFM	Land Access and Land Use TE
Kristina Sweet	VAAFM	Product, Processing, and Market Development TE
Bruce Hennessey	Maple Wind Farm	Product, Processing, and Market Development TE
Liz Gleason	VHCB	Product, Processing, and Market Development TE
Michelle Klieger	Helianth Partners	Product, Processing, and Market Development TE

# About Farm to Plate



The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF) serves as the administrator and backbone organization to the Farm to Plate Network and manages the analysis and goal tracking of the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan implementation.

VSJF provides the following services to the Farm to Plate Network:

- Guides **VISION** and provides **STRATEGIC GUIDANCE** and **COORDINATION** to Network groups.
- **SUPPORTS ALIGNED ACTIVITIES** and **FACILITATES DIALOGUE** across the Network on key issues to advance new ideas, fix bottlenecks, reduce unnecessary duplication of efforts, and open new markets for Vermont products in a coordinated fashion.
- Implements **SHARED MEASUREMENT PRACTICES** using the Results Based Accountability framework—a planning and evaluation framework used in Vermont by dozens of nonprofits, the legislature, and state government agencies—and tracks progress on the outcomes and goals of the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan.
- **MOBILIZES FUNDING** to support the work of Farm to Plate Network groups and strategy implementation.
- Manages **COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH** about Vermont’s food system to member organizations and the general public.
- Provides **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** and **LEADERSHIP TRAINING** opportunities for Network members.
- **BUILDS PUBLIC WILL** to support local agriculture and the food system as key drivers of sustainable economic development in Vermont.

## Farm to Plate Staff



Jake Claro



Kelly Dolan



Becca Warren



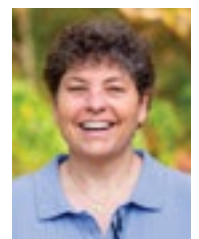
Esther Erbe



Kelly Nottermann



Sydney Lucia



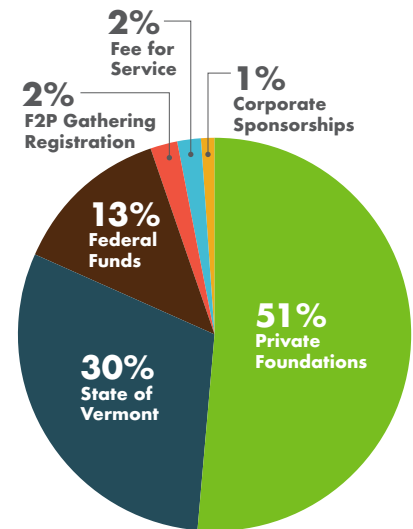
Ellen Kahler



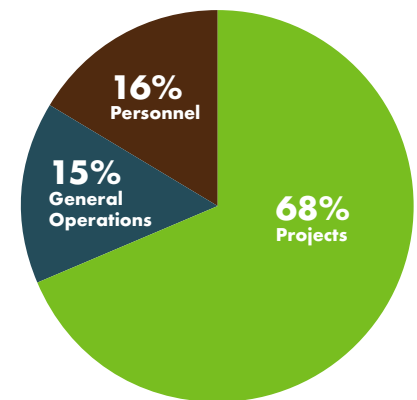
# F2P FY23 Financials

Revenue	
Private Foundations	\$630,501
State of Vermont	\$366,539
Federal Funds (USDA, CDC/VDH, US HHS/HRSA)	\$162,583
F2P Gathering Registration	\$24,247
Fee for Service	\$29,410
Corporate Sponsorships	\$14,850
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,228,130</b>
Expenses	
F2P General Operations	\$192,684
F2P Personnel	\$203,299
F2P Projects	
Farm to Plate Network Meetings / Gathering	\$98,785
Farm to Plate Leadership and Participant Stipends	\$48,150
Food Security Roadmap Project	\$221,835
Independent Grocers Project	\$63,605
Beef on Dairy Project	\$122,959
Other Farm to Plate Network Projects	\$12,700
New England Feeding New England Project	\$285,459
F2P Projects Total	\$853,493
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,249,477</b>

Farm to Plate Investment Program Revenue



Farm to Plate Investment Program Expenses



Note: This is an unaudited financial report. As of January 1, 2022 the VSJF has switched to a calendar based fiscal year (Jan–Dec). This financial report represents revenue and expenses during the period of the state fiscal year (July 1, 2022–June 30, 2023).

## Funding Partners

The VSJF and the Farm to Plate Network are extremely grateful to our funding partners who help to fund the work of the Farm to Plate community and are actively engaged in various projects within the Network. Their ongoing support allows us to find creative solutions to complex problems, and grow a stronger, healthier, more prosperous food system in Vermont and the region.

- Angell Foundation
- Anonymous Foundations
- Canaday Family Charitable Trust
- Centers for Disease Control (via VT Department of Health)
- Henry P. Kendall Foundation
- Sandy River Charitable Trust
- US Department of Agriculture
- US Department of Health & Human Services/HRSA
- Various Corporate Sponsors
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (General Fund & Working Lands Enterprise Fund)
- Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development (General Fund)
- Vermont Community Foundation



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