

# VERMONT HOUSING & CONSERVATION BOARD



Vermont  
Housing &  
Conservation  
Board

**House Committee on Agriculture,  
Food Resiliency & Forestry**

**April 19, 2024**

Presented by

Gus Seelig, VHCB Executive Director

Stacy Cibula, VHCB Agricultural Director

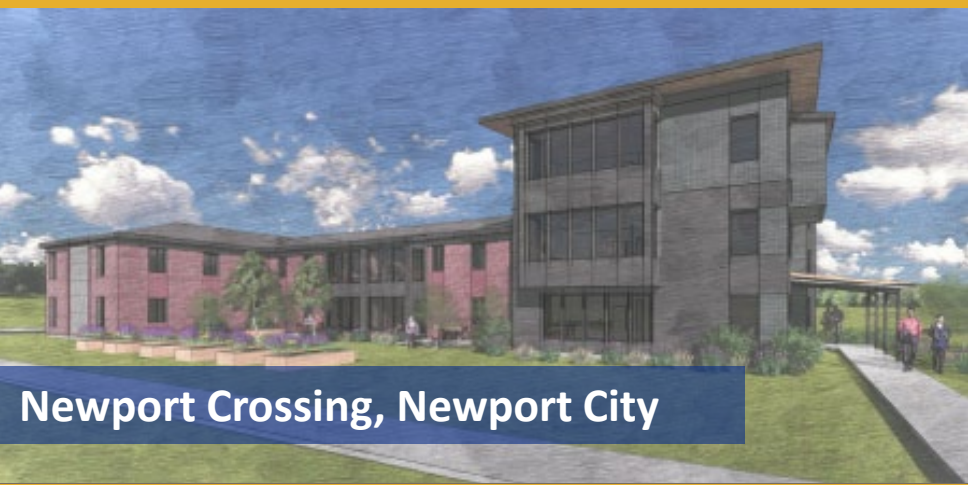
Calley Hastings, VT Farm & Forest Viability Program Manager

Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor  
Stowe & Waterbury

*Photo by The Gardner Group at RE/MAX North Professionals*



Lake Memphremagog, Newport



Newport Crossing, Newport City



Newport Waterfront Recreation Path



# Statutory Purpose

“the dual goals of creating affordable housing for Vermonters, and conserving and protecting Vermont’s agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.”

10 V.S.A.15 §302



# Conservation Programs

- Recreational Lands, Forests, and Natural Areas Conservation
- Historic Preservation
- Water Quality
- VHCB AmeriCorps
- Farmland Protection & Access
- Farm & Forest Viability Program
- Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)







# Housing Programs

- Multi-Family Rental Housing
- Home Ownership
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Shelter Improvement and Expansion
- Manufactured Home Communities
- Home Accessibility Improvements
- Community Planning & Technical Assistance
- Farmworker Housing
- Recovery Residences

**15,000 homes across Vermont**



Darling Inn, Lyndon



Forest Hill Shelter, Hyde Park



# Housing Production since 2020

## *Over 3,900 households served*

- **Rental Housing:** 1,979 homes created and preserved
- **Homeownership:** 238 families became homeowners
- **Manufactured Home Communities:** Infill homes and improved infrastructure in 6 MHCs serving 839 homes.
- **Shelter:** 489 new and improved beds
- **Farmworker housing:** 110 farmworkers
- **Accessible housing:** Accessibility improvements for 224 disabled Vermonters
- **Recovery Housing:** 4 projects with 58 beds
- **Lead mitigation:** 60 homes with reduced lead levels

Riverwalk Apartments  
Hartford



# Farmland Conservation



Cadreact Farm, Milton

Since 1987:

- 173,000 acres of farmland conserved
- 808 farms conserved
- \$96M in State funds
- \$87M in Federal funds

Between 2018 and 2023, nearly 40% of projects were farm transfers.

18 month pipeline: 85 projects, 15,000 acres, \$31M funds needed



# Farmland Access & Succession

Land conservation and business planning support to farm and forest businesses helps new farmers afford farmland and diversifies agriculture.



Button Farm, Chelsea



Wild Earth Farm, Randolph

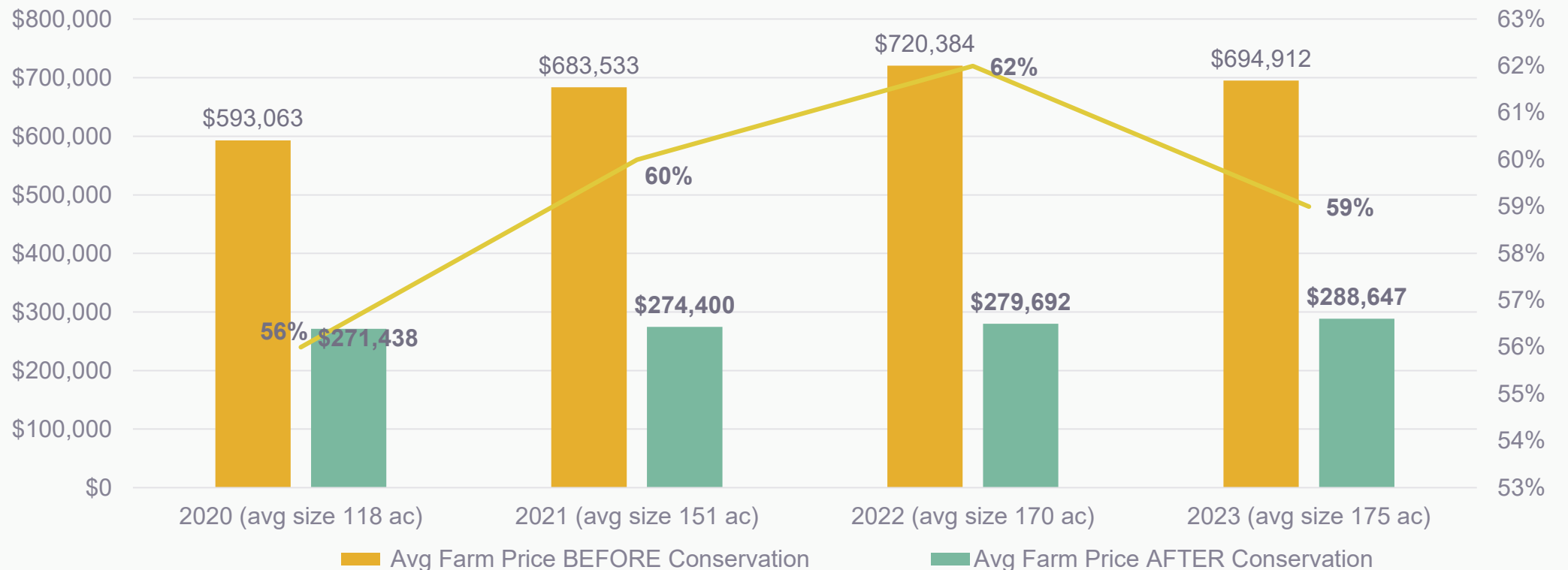


Hursch Farm, Morristown



# Price of Conserved Land

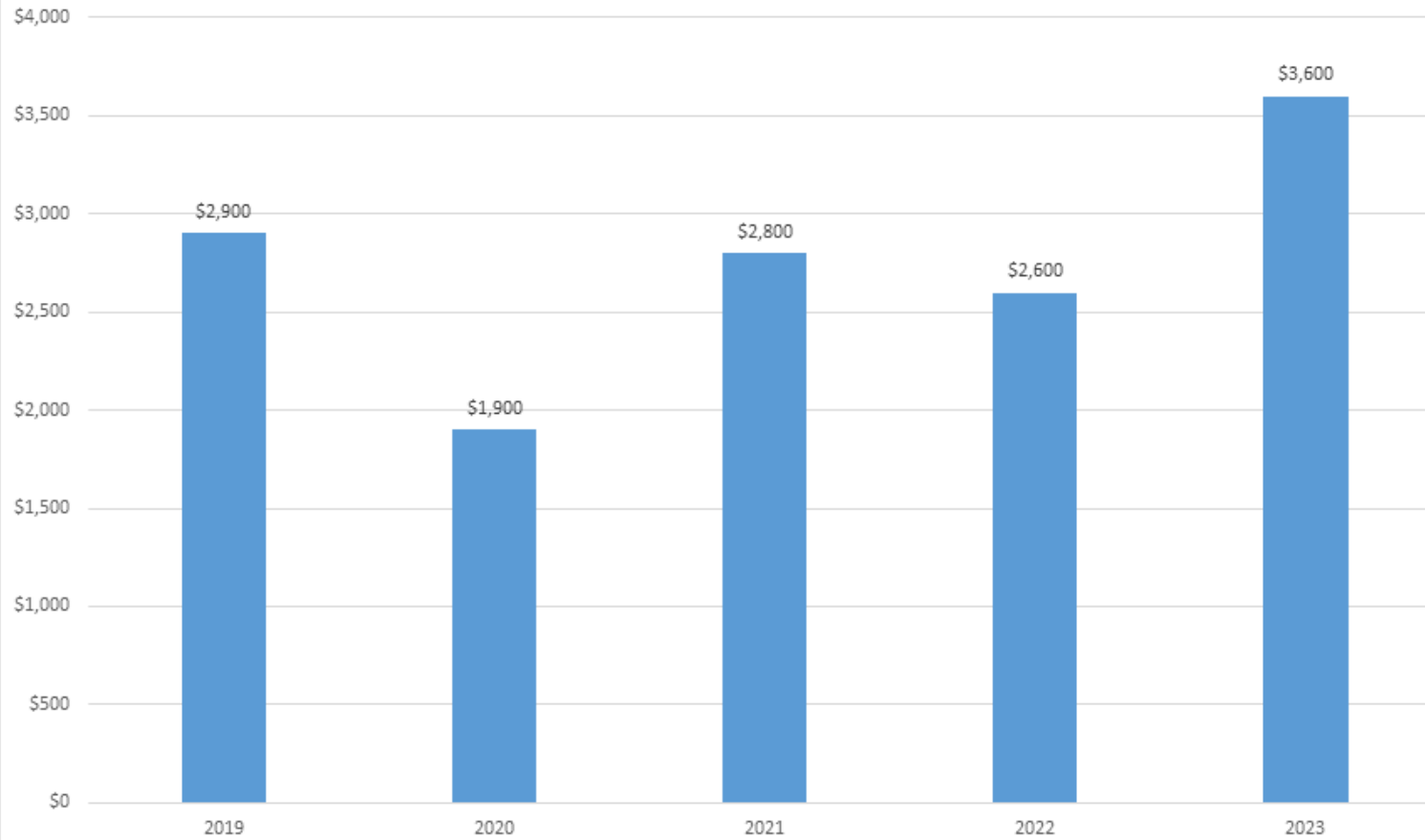
VHCB Funded Farms - 2020 to 2023





# Price of Conserved Land

Average per acre conserved farm price 2019 - 2023  
*Franklin, Orleans, Essex, Lamoille, Caledonia, and Grand Isle Counties*





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## NRCS ACEP ALE & Future Funds

ACEP-ALE is a critical source of match funds to State dollars: ~\$3 - \$4M annually

Inflation Reduction Act will bring more opportunities (on top of ACEP-ALE):  
~\$6M in 2025  
~7M in 2026



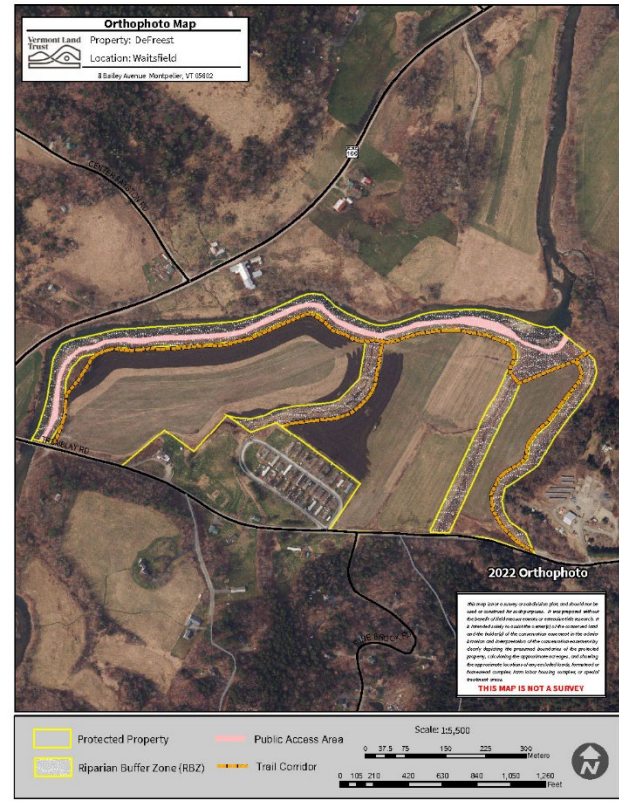
The Farm Upstream, Jericho





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# Buy, Protect, Sell

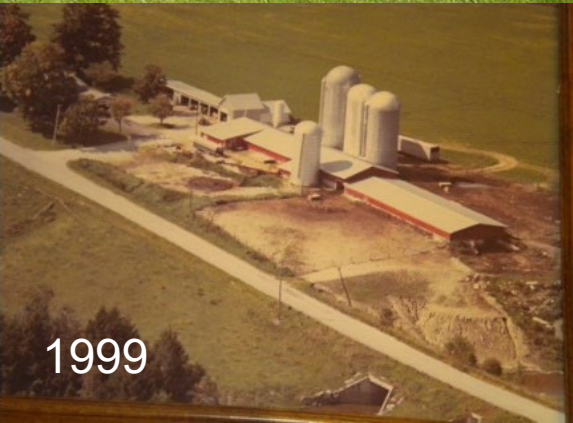


Defreest Farm, Waitsfield



# Water Quality

Choiniere Farm, Highgate





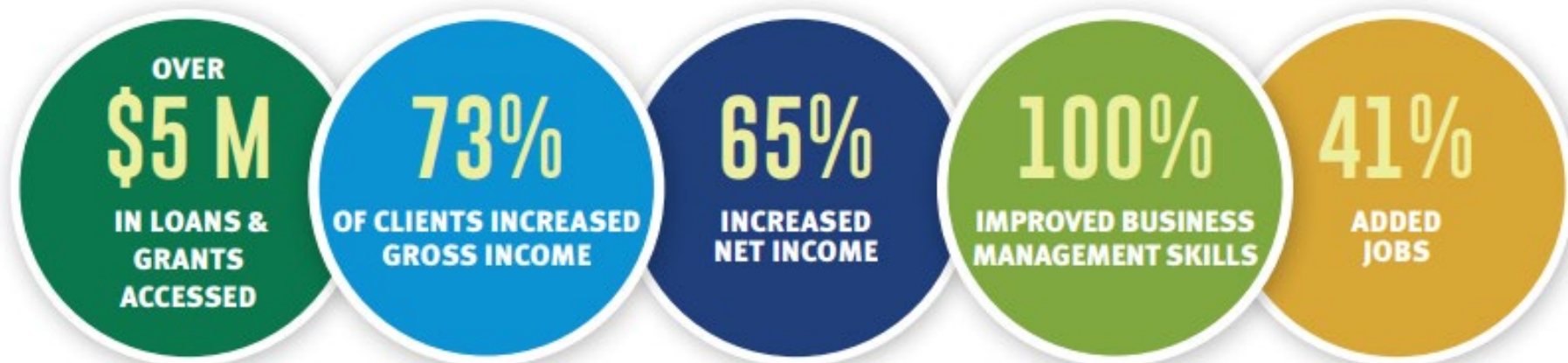
# Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

“It’s been so reassuring. It’s easy to feel isolated, but they’ve helped me find a path forward and motivated me to keep going.”

~ Hannah Pearce



Hannah Pearce  
Hillside Farm, East Albany





# Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program: Service Provider Network

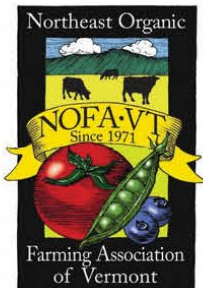
## Service Provider Network:

- NOFA-VT
- The Intervale Center
- Center for an Agricultural Economy
- UVM-Extension
- Land for Good

In addition, we partner with a wider network to deliver critical services, such as land access work led by the Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust and the Vermont Land Trust.



The Farm & Forest Viability Team, service providers, and Tim & Janet Taylor - Crossroad Farm, West Fairlee





# Frost, Flood, and Climate Resilience

- We continue to see the impacts of 2023's frost, flooding, and wet weather
- Profitable farms have more ability to invest in proactive solutions
- Farmers want support integrating climate resilience into their business planning
- Business planning supports adaptation and innovation



**Kylie & Sam Rossier**  
**Sunday Bell Farm, Danville**





## **Justin Sauerwein Almanack Farm, Chelsea**

Justin owns and manages a 100% grass fed Wagyu-Angus cross cattle farm in Chelsea, VT. He worked with the VT Farm & Forest Viability Program to write a business plan, access financing to purchase land, navigate the conservation process, and expand his business onto new land.



## **Mara Hearst Levy Lamb, Dorset**

The Levy Lamb flock of sheep rotates intensively on 80+ acres of leased pastures between Dorset, Rupert, and West Pawlet. Mara is currently working on business planning and assessing costs of production with the Program.



## The Helman/Grazanio Family Sandy Bottom Farm, Isle La Motte

### **\$10,000 Implementation Grant for a four-season wash/pack station**

“These upgrades will help our business expand, enable four-season produce packing, and improve the sustainability of our operations through water and energy efficiencies – it’s an essential component of our planned growth. We also won’t have to worry about our water supply freezing and it will create a better work environment to bring on a full-time employee.”

*–Patrick Helman, Sandy Bottom Farm*





# 2024 Water Quality Grants



**George Lawson, Cornerstone Dairy, Irasburg**  
**\$25,000 for a manure injection hose**

\$807,626 awarded to 21 farm businesses to reduce non-point source pollution and improve water quality.



# Business Planning

## Currier Forest Products, Danville

“My team would not have been able to accomplish the feasibility studies for the low-impact equipment we were considering without these consultants and the unique access to them that the Viability Program provided.

The greatest benefit of the Viability Program has been allowing me to move business decisions forward without feeling like I am doing so blindly.”

-Joel Currier, Currier Forest Products





# Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)



Alex Englert and Mike Scheps,  
Maplebrook Farm, Bennington

- Assists small towns, businesses, and organizations with accessing critical funding for economic development projects
- Focused on working lands, outdoor recreation, and community-based economic development
- Since 2017, \$800,000 in REDI funds has helped secure more than \$18M in grants for businesses & communities

**\$800,000** → **\$18,822,078**  
REDI FUNDS SINCE 2017 GRANTS TO COMMUNITIES  
(LEVERAGED 22:1; \$276,795 AWARD AVG.)



# Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)



Buffalo Mountain Co-op, Hardwick

Local food access and community development in Hardwick

Buffalo Mountain Co-op was awarded a \$191,575 Healthy Food Financing Initiative grant and a \$130,500 Working Lands Market-Level Infrastructure grant to expand operations in a new location and provide a larger market for local producers.



# 18-month Pipeline

## Housing, Conservation & Historic Preservation

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- 200 million to house over 940 households through rental units, shared equity homes, shelter beds and farmworker housing improvements
- Agricultural and natural resources projects in the near term exceeds \$50 million in requests to conserve approximately:
  - 85 farms
  - 43,204 acres of natural areas and outdoor recreation sites
  - 24 historic buildings.





# Farmworker Housing Needs Assessment

## Scale of Farmworker Housing Needs by Type\*



\* Based on 2021 estimate of 600 farmworker dwellings housing 2,000 workers.





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## Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program

Program administered by  
Champlain Housing Trust  
in partnership  
with UVM Extension

0% interest forgivable loans for:

- repair of existing housing
- replacement of housing beyond repair/ not suitable for habitation





# Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program



## PHASE I

Buildings repaired: 38

Buildings replaced: 6

Farmworkers impacted:

Repair Program: 166

Replacement Program: 25

**PHASE II:** inquiries for 66 farms  
*(as of January 2024)*

## VHCB Investment

**\$3.3 million**

**Repair Program**

**\$1.3 million**

**Replacement Program**





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# THANK YOU

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**The Doyle Family**  
Boneyard Farm, Fletcher

