

RURAL VERMONT 2023 COURSE OF ACTION 11/15/22

Our 2023 priorities for organizing, education, advocacy and action are shaped at the intersection of many influences. This is an overview of some of the many issue areas we work on and support. Learn more and stay up to date: visit www.ruralvermont.org, follow us on social media, and subscribe to our e-newsletter.

Launch of the La Via Campesina supported Agroecology and Movement Building School: After co-hosting the 2022 Agroecology Encounter in Marshfield, we have been working as part of a collective effort to build an agroecology and movement building school in Vermont in a collaboration with local, regional and national partners. The school will highlight farmer to farmer training models and popular and political education, and seeks to increase access to and uplift those already doing this work.

Federal On-Farm Slaughter Amendment: With partner organizations, including the National Family Farm Coalition, Food and Ranch Freedom Alliance, and the Farm to Consumer Legal Defense Fund, we aim to amend the Federal Meat Inspection Act to clarify outdated language from the personal-use exemption to more closely align with standing Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) guidance and state laws which explicitly allow livestock owners to slaughter their animals on the farm where they were raised or to hire an itinerant slaughterer. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets is in support of amending the federal law to provide more clarity on this issue.

Payments for Ecosystem Services: The three-year working group process to assess whether new financial incentives are needed to promote a number of ecosystem services ends with a consensus to enhance the federal Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with additional rewards for farms in Vermont. The Small Farmer Group, that Rural Vermont is part of, has advocated since 2020 for the so-called CSP+ proposal. We continue to inform the working group and the legislature with our farmer-led recommendations.

Cannabis: We'll continue to work with other members of the VT Cannabis Equity Coalition to achieve a market which is economically equitable, racially just, and agriculturally accessible. Some of our goals include: reducing the significant barriers to accessing licensure and agricultural services for cultivators and farmers, to create ongoing funding for the Cannabis Development Fund and for reinvestment in communities disproportionately harmed by criminalization, to ensure direct market access for producers and the public, and to create scale appropriate licensing for breeding, manufacturing of products, and live plant sales.

Healthcare: In collaboration with grassroots and other healthcare advocates, we continue to offer farm(work)er specific training opportunities around healthcare access, amplify agrarian voices in healthcare, and work in coalition with experienced healthcare advocates towards our goal of publicly funded universal access to healthcare for all.

Market development and rules for composting food residuals on farms: With the Protect Our Soils Coalition, we work to secure markets for on-farm and community scale composting of food residuals by

advocating for regulating depackaging technology, strengthening the source separation requirement and the hierarchy for organics management. Next year, the rules for farms that compost food scraps will be released and we aim to offer new on-farm workshops, with a focus on utilizing poultry forage.

Land, Capital, and Housing: Long term secure access to land, capital, and appropriate housing are some of the most pressing issues faced in the agricultural community, locally and globally. There are many efforts ongoing to collaboratively listen to stakeholders and address these issues: the Milk with Dignity Program and Migrant Justice, Just Construction, the Farmworker Housing Repair Program, Every Town, the Land Access and Opportunity Board, the Farm to Plate Network, the Land Grab Working Group at the National Family Farm Coalition, and more. We will continue to participate and monitor different programs and conversations, consider particular leverage points we may be best suited to work on, and bring the experiences and concerns of our members to the conversation.

Workshop Series: Our popular series of food sovereignty workshops continue, partnering with farmers and other members of the agricultural community to teach how to process raw dairy at home, slaughter and process poultry and livestock, and we'll offer a new community food scrap composting workshops for farms.

Farm To Plate: We continue to have a seat on the Farm to Plate Steering Committee and to participate as we are able in a number of groups within its new organizational structure, including: the Policy Priority Strategy Team (co-creating a "policy roadmap"), the Agroforestry Priority Strategy Team, the Meat Slaughter and Processing Priority Strategy Team, the Food Cycle Coalition, Food Security Priority Strategy Team (co-creating a food security plan for the State), and more. These relationships allow us to be in conversation with diverse groups of organizational stakeholders working towards particular goals and outcomes.

Quarterly Member Forums and Ongoing Grassroots Engagement: We are now hosting quarterly member forums. These are opportunities for our members to join our Director of Grassroots Organizing, our Legislative Director, and our Policy Director in a virtual forum to discuss particular issues which may be affecting your farm and/or community, and/or that we are currently working on. We seek additional feedback from members and allies on an ongoing basis through 1:1 meetings, kitchen table conversations, and more.

Small Farm Action Days: In partnership with NOFA-VT and other organizations, we will continue to host Small Farm Action Days at the Statehouse at least 3 times throughout the legislative session. These are opportunities for you to become familiar with the Statehouse itself, with the policy making process and some active issues, and to meet with your representative or provide testimony on issues that affect you.

Accessory On-Farm Business and Act 250: We look forward to participating in a larger collaborative effort to amend the law governing Accessory On-Farm Businesses (AOFBs) in order to ensure consistent definitions across laws which define agriculture, to address how Act 250 intersects with AOFBs, and ideally to ensure that there is adequate outreach and education done to municipal governance and the agricultural community so that the law is more widely understood and enforced across Vermont. We are also supporting farmers with AOFBs in court by expressing the significant need to uphold existing carve outs from Act 250 for farms.