

Farmland Access in Vermont

Presented by the Vermont Housing
and Conservation Board and the
Vermont Land Trust

- Introductions
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Tools in the Toolbox
- What's next?



Bear Roots Farm, Barre

VHCB Conservation Programs



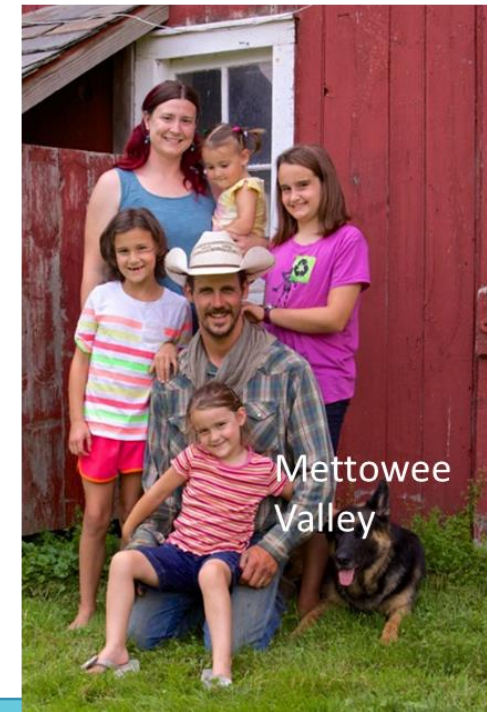
Wild Earth Farm, Randolph

- Recreational Lands, Forestland, and Natural Areas Conservation
- Farmland Conservation and Farmland Access
- Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program: Farm and Forest Business Planning, Succession Planning, and grant opportunities
- Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)
- Land Access & Opportunity Board
- Water Quality Protections and Grant Funding

Farmland Succession: Intergenerational Transfers



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





VHCB Agriculture Program – Farmland Access Support

- Farmland conservation funding > increases access and affordability.
- Secure \$3M+ annually in Federal dollars to match State funds.
- Organizational support for farmland access partners like VLT.
- VHCB Farm and Forest Viability Program – business, transfer, and succession planning support.

Choiniere Farm, Highgate

VHCB Ag Program by the Numbers



Mettowee Valley Farmers



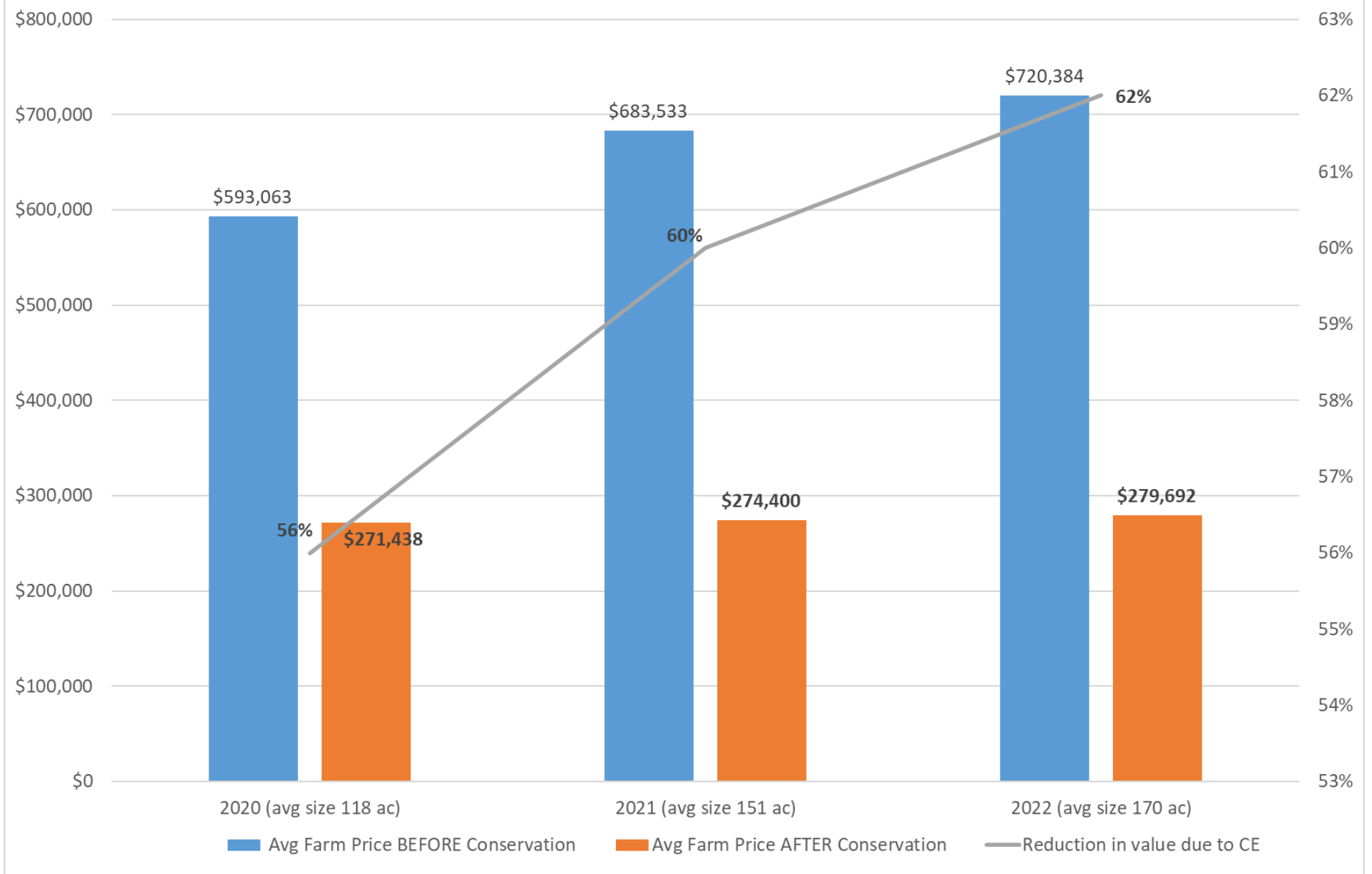
Last Resort Farm, Monkton



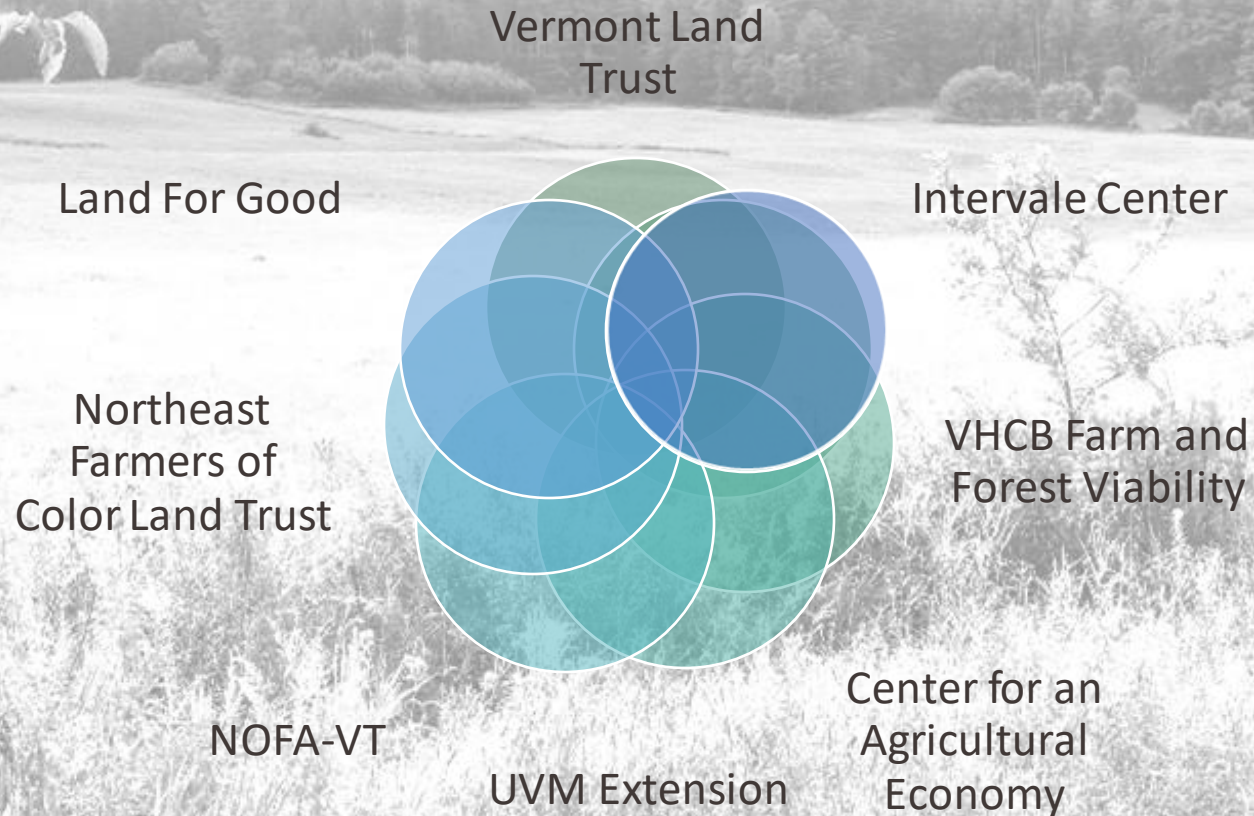
Gray Dairy Farm, Holland

- 170,918 acres conserved
- 789 farms conserved
- \$181 million in state and federal investment
- 7 farm projects using retro-active OPAVs since 2019
- 40% of farm projects since 2019 involve farm transfers

VHCB Funded Farms - 2020 to 2022



Land Access is one component of shared effort to get the next generation farmers successfully onto land



Vermont Land Trust



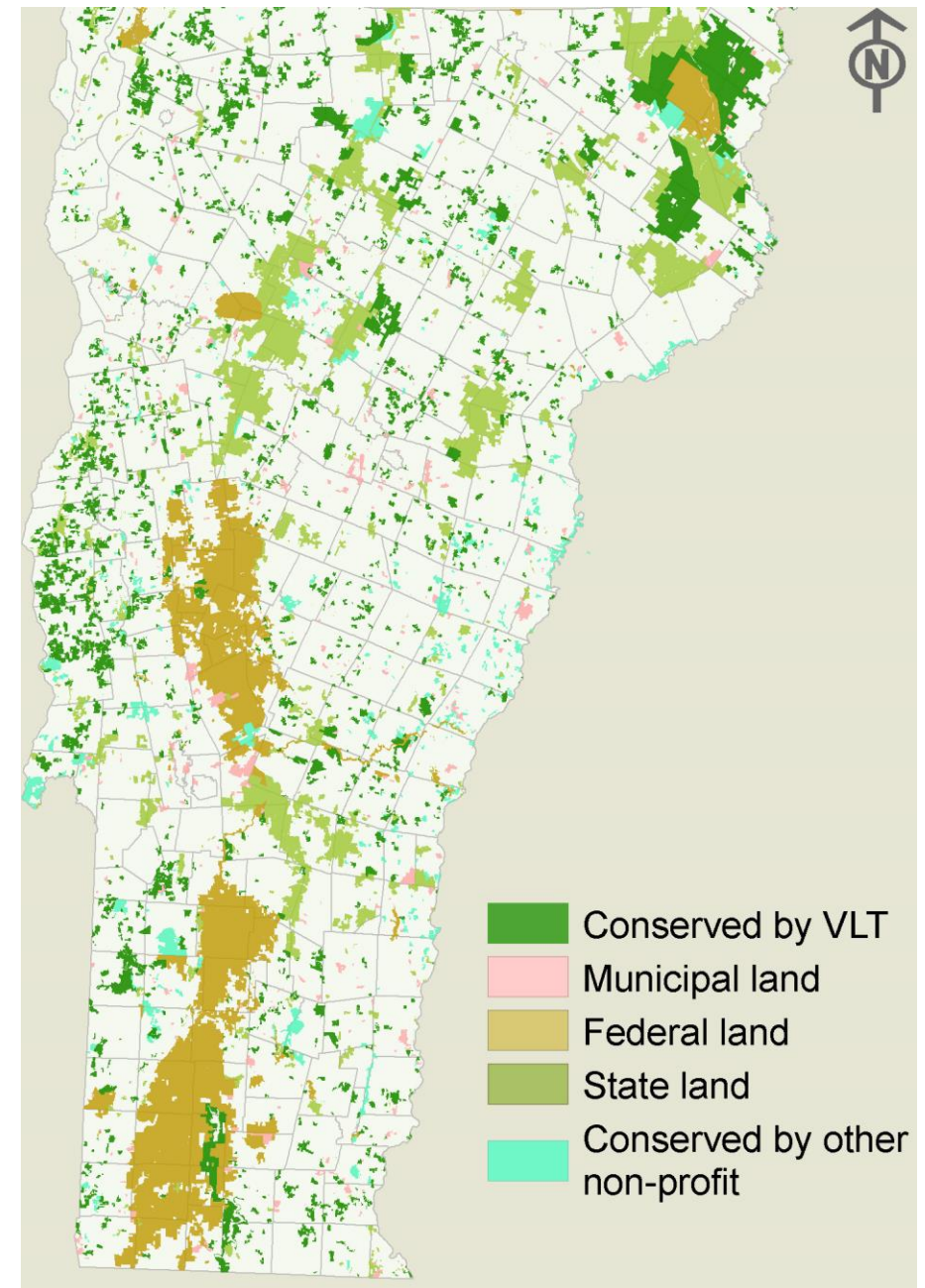
UNITING LAND AND LIVES

Rooted in Vermont since 1977, the Vermont Land Trust helps people protect, care for, and connect to the home we share.



VLT Snapshot:

- Founded in 1977
- Conserved 11% Vermont, over 620,000 acres
- Steward 2,300 easements
- 46 employees statewide



VLT Farmland Protection and Access



Harrison Farm, Addison

Over 1,000 farms conserved

216,000 acres protected

12% of Vermont's agricultural soils protected

Over 100 successful transfers

VLT's Farmland Access Program seeks to serve the needs of the next generation of farmers

- Provide secure access to affordable farmland
- Who do we work with?
 - First time farm buyers
 - Expanding farmers
 - Transitioning farmers
- Diverse array of operations
- Wrap around support with partners

*Full Belly Farm
Monkton*



CHALLENGES

- Availability
- Affordability
- Business viability
- Security
- Equity

OPPORTUNITIES

- New & beginning farmers
- Existing tools
- Existing partnerships
- Expanding partnerships
- New and evolving tools



Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

- 20 years of in-depth advising
- 900+ farm, food & forest products businesses served

In 2022:

- 154 enterprises engaged. Combined, they generate approximately 462 jobs and \$34.7M in annual gross sales.
- 1/3 clients engage in transition planning

NEARLY
\$2.85M
IN LOANS &
GRANTS
ACCESSED

70%
OF CLIENTS REPORTED
INCREASED
GROSS SALES

61%
OF CLIENTS REPORTED
INCREASED
NET INCOME



Lisa MacDougall, Mighty Food Farm, Shaftsbury



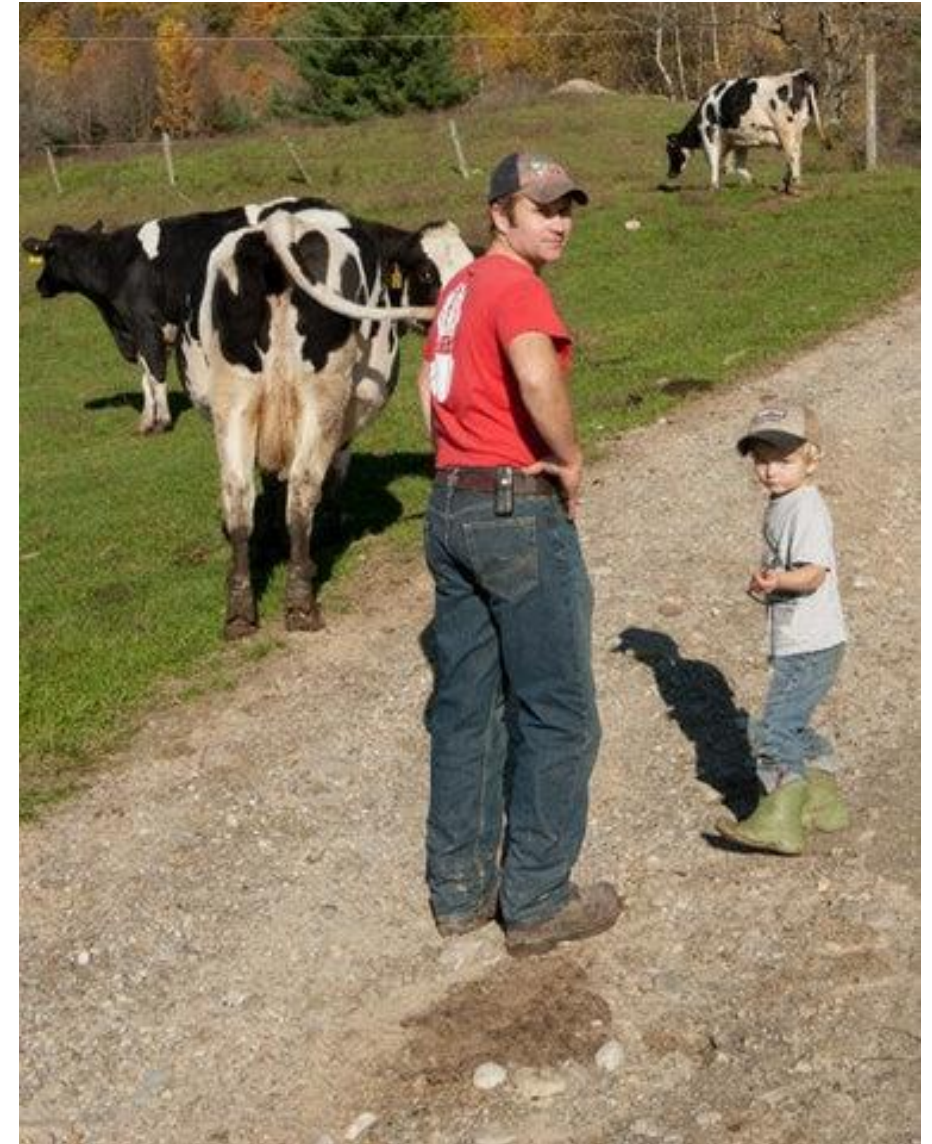
**We use a variety of tools to achieve
outcomes**

Bear Roots Farm
Barre

Farmland Conservation > Farm Transfer: Ledge Haven Farm



Mike and Tom Audet, Ledge Haven Farm. Photo credit Cabot Creamery.



Jon Lucas, Lucas Dairy Farm. Photo credit Cabot Creamery.

2004 ADDED AFFORDABILITY GOAL:

Keep conserved farmland in ownership of farmers

“Make reasonable efforts to assure that conserved farmland is accessible and affordable to future generations of farmers.”

The purpose of ensuring that working and productive agricultural lands remain available for production agriculture, affordable and owned by individuals actively engaged in farming will be further advanced by the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value.



How does the Option work?

1. Option **not** triggered by a sale to a family member or farmer.*
2. *Buyers who are “Qualified Farmers” earn at least 1/2 of gross income from farming and are exempt from Option.
3. If buyer is not family or a farmer, the owner of conserved farm provides copy of Purchase and Sale Agreement and Buyer's farm business plan to easement holders.
4. Holders have 30 days to decide to waive or give Notice of Intent to Exercise Option.

OPAV EXERCISE EXAMPLE

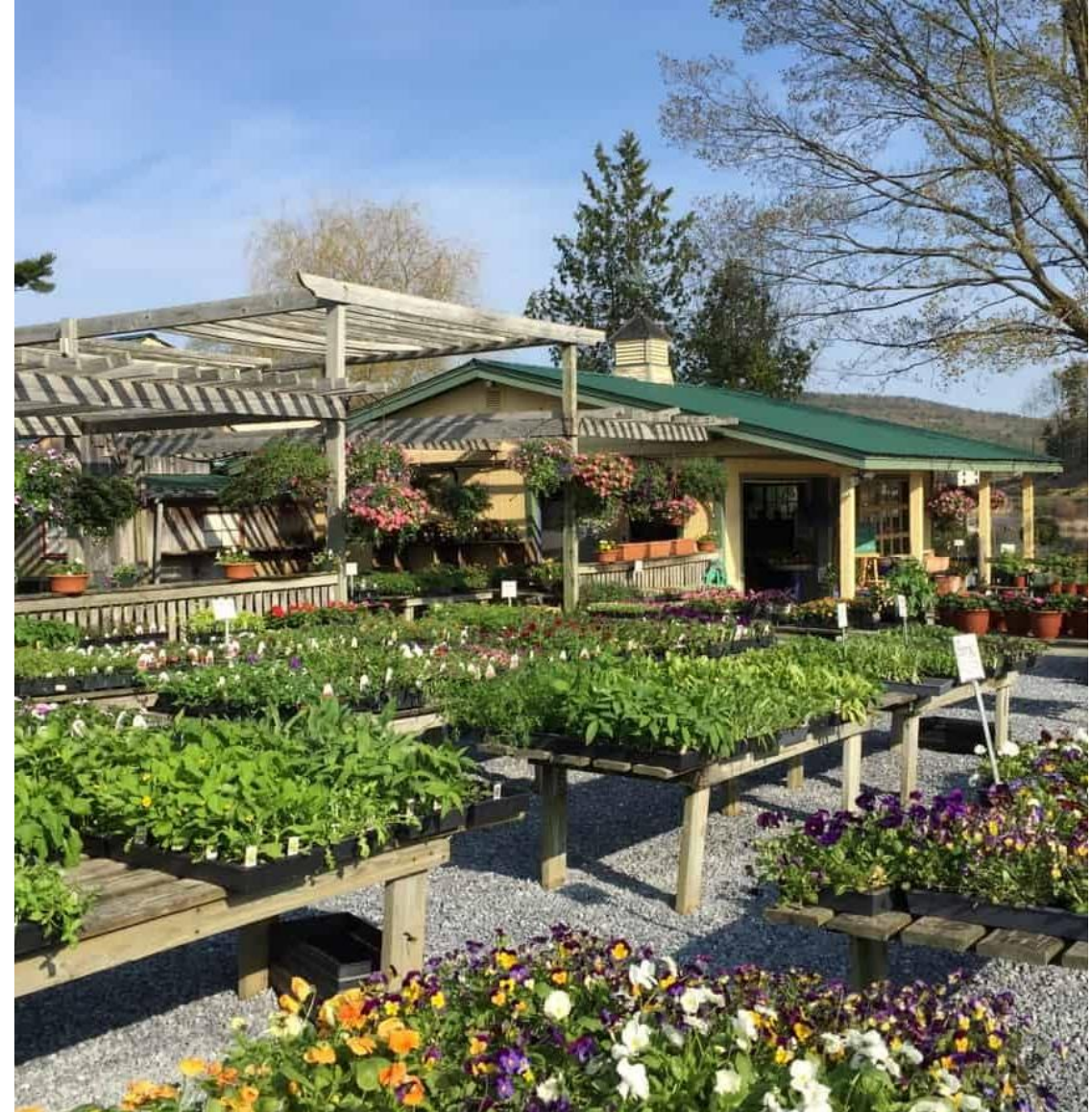
1. Farmer acquired 363 acre farm for \$200,000
2. Farmer signed contract to sell OPAV farm to non farmer for \$410,000
3. VLT acquired farm for \$315,00
4. Price reflected
 1. New infrastructure improvements
 2. Increase of farmland at agricultural value



Retroactive OPAV and Viability Support: Wood's Market Garden



Elyse and Dan Wulfsuhle, Wood's Market Garden, Brandon



Farmland Futures Fund: specific goals around water quality, transition, and diversification

- Opportunity for on-farm water quality improvements, restoration and/or water quality easement protections
- At risk of transitioning to non-farming owners and/or going out of production and is likely to continue in farmer ownership and agricultural production with VLT support
- farm transfer supports one or more of the following desired outcomes:
 - next-generation farm ownership and/or first farm purchase
 - ownership by underserved or underrepresented farmer
 - continuation of a highly visible and viable existing agricultural business
 - improved and/or innovative land management practices
 - increased diversification and/or innovative farm operation
 - improved/increased viability of existing farm operation

Farmland Futures Fund and Viability Support: Old Soul Farm



Tree planting along the Stevens Branch of the Winooski, May 2022. Photo credit Kyle Gray.



Matt Systo. Photo credit Old Soul Farm.



Matt Systo & Kim Rich, Old Soul Farm, Barre



“We needed help figuring out the best path to take our business to achieve our goal of financial sustainability. We have no shortage of ideas of where we want our business to go, but it’s been critical to have the help of mentors and advisors to assist us in figuring out where our time, energy, and resources are best spent.”

– Matt Systo & Kim Rich

Longer term ownership by VLT provide opportunities for new tools

- Creative lease arrangements
- Creative land holding models
- Affordability tools

Old Road Farm, Granville



White River Land Collaborative

Mission: To create a land-based economy rooted in equitable land access, collaborative relationships and community involvement





Thank you!

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