

farm to plate

NETWORK

DEEP-DIVE SESSIONS

1. Farmland Access and Food Security: Exploring Dynamic Linkages

Land in agriculture in Vermont decreased over 6% from 1997 to 2007 and 12.7% of Vermonters (33,000 households) were considered food insecure from 2010 to 2012. How will Vermont contribute toward feeding the state and region in the years ahead with less land in agriculture? How are farmland access and food access related? How can increasing land in agriculture lead to increasing food security and access to healthy food for everyone? How do we make farmland access a public health issue? What are the land use challenges facing Vermont given the need to increase land in agricultural production?

Facilitator: Erin Buckwalter, [NOFA Vermont](#)

Presenters:

Jon Ramsay, [Vermont Land Trust](#)

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John Sayles, [Vermont Foodbank](#)

Noelle MacKay, Commissioner, [Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development](#)

Ryan Wood Beauchamp, [Evening Song Farm](#)

This session should be of interest to members of the [Food Access Cross-Cutting Team](#), the [Farmland Access & Stewardship Working Group](#), the [Financing Cross-Cutting Team](#), and the [Aggregation & Distribution Working Group](#).

Panel Discussion:

How are you seeing the connection between food security and farmland access?

- 🍷 Food banking is understanding that the whole world of food banks is changing. We can contribute to people's health. More emphasis on fresh local food. There is often surplus because of the way farming happens. Looking to make more connections and more creative ideas to bring in fresh food.
- 🍷 When you go around our food system you see the loss of farmland - true in Thailand and China. The reason we don't notice this is that we have been subsidized around fossil fuel production. But we are starting to see the yield in our grains plateauing. Development is happening in areas that were previously untouched. We are reaching a tipping point.
- 🍷 A lot of the innovations and tools in Vermont are spreading to other places. Example of what is happening in CT around conservation easements. As continue to innovate in VT, we need to continue to put this on the public agenda.

By 2060 we will be feeding 17 million people in New England. As was said, if we can't generate more food for the region, then people will start moving here which might create challenges with land availability. Thoughts?

- 👉 To have surplus food you need to have profitable farms producing that surplus, and to have those profitable farms you need access to land and good soil. Now in many areas you see a mansion in the center of what would otherwise be farmland. This starts with town development plans.
- 👉 We all need to live somewhere, and we all need to eat. We have to plan ahead if we want good land for food.
- 👉 Have to be active at local and regional levels. In the bigger picture we need to have a sense of how much land we are going to need going forward to feed people from local sources.
- 👉 There is a land use conversation to be had as well. When you look around Burlington, the issues are affordability, suitability of land. Also have to think about climate change and how land will be affected.
- 👉 The work to build a more diverse food system and network is a move in the direction of food security.

Examples of things linking food security and food access/production?

- 👉 There are gleaned programs around the state. Also organizations like Post-Oil Solutions and the Intervale Center. There are wonderful groups that are making these connections. It's about partnerships and people working together.
- 👉 The entry-point for farmers at Intervale is a desire to feed one's community. It's not about making a million dollars.
- 👉 Another great story is gleaned. Working with Hunger Free VT for people to come down weekly and collect food. Great to see satisfaction and use, and people are now wanting to buy into the Intervale food hub. Exciting now to see these people showing up as willing customers.
- 👉 Tension between and trap in price of production and what people can afford. If people can't afford food at a price that a farmer needs to charge order to cover costs and make a profit - first farmers need to be profitable, can't just be affordable to neighbors. If you are turning a profit, then you can donate through gleaned efforts.
- 👉 Taking vegetables off farm can mean giving nutrients away that could otherwise go into soil. Now looking at statewide composting plan that could feed nutrients back into soil.
- 👉 Other examples: Land Trust and VHCV partnership, seeing the merit in smaller farms,
- 👉 Having more incubator farms around the country would be helpful. Need ways for those starting out to get access to preserved land.

A-HA's and Questions:

More details about [Kingsbury Farm](#):

The community really got together and preserved that farm. The Land Trust put conservation easements on it. Looked for people to take it on. Plan had been for Food Bank to run the farm. Became clear that it would not be viable for Food Bank to raise all this money. Food Bank created lease option through RFP to farmers and got a lot of responses.

Not sure this is a long-term replicable model. It's nonprofit farming. They haven't figured out for-profit farming yet, non-profit is more challenging. Long-term sustainable model is figuring out how people can live on and off the land.

About to talk to Land Trust about preserving a second farm. First one was a great project. Second one is about 80 acres and is classic VT hillside farm. Not a priority farm. On the other hand it has been farmed for over 100 years. This is a viable farm. **What do people think about preserving less than prime farms?**

- 👉 In light of climate change, people are needing to move out of flood plains.
- 👉 A number of years ago, UVM along with Intervale formed farmland access network. Saw conservation easement as only one tool with limitations. If that tool is not available, there are other options.

Emily Miller of [Fair Food Farm](#)—Idea been thinking about for a while - co-housing with farmland for farmers to share. In many co-housing situations, the houses are more expensive than farmers can afford. Want to see housing that has mixed housing options. World-wide, single mothers who have the greatest satisfaction are those that live in co-housing.

In the name of being provocative - supporting farmers to be charitable seems like we are only addressing food insecurity symptomatically. The causes of food insecurity include poverty and wage injustices, racism. How to get at this through farmland access and farm viability? Can we?

- 👉 If one farmer had to work many different plots . . . thinking more about how farming is done and who does it.
- 👉 Don't want more charity to be the solution to the problem.
- 👉 To solve the problem you need sustainable families. Giving people a chance to engage in the Intervale is a good example, and it's not for everyone. I want to go to the farmers market and be able to afford that food.

There are so many barriers to those in poverty. Is this the moment for food?

- 👉 There are broader conversations about wages. If others in other sectors and fields understand why food security matters, then we can move forward.
- 👉 Would like to know more about the demand side of things. Would like to know more about who is food insecure, what they want and need. Could we do this at net year's convening.
- 👉 Interesting point. We have scholarship funds and have had a hard time finding families who could accept. And for those who could, they only had a microwave.
- 👉 We have been focused on food insecurity at the small scale. Also talking about the regional level. We have to re-think, fundamentally, the tools- land planning, community banking, etc.
- 👉 Putting our organization between low income consumers and farmers. Thinking about a sliding scale concept. Some people earn more, others less, should create payment model along similar lines. Curious with business planning, are there farmers who are actually doing different levels of pricing?
- 👉 A lot of farmers under-price their food. Priority number one is to make sure they can cover their costs. You can't ask farmers to do much more.

- 👉 Elizabeth Henderson's CSA in NY state was set up on a sliding scale from \$9-14, on honor system. That worked pretty well. No one was being asked to objectify themselves.
- 👉 Another example where certain CSA shares might be subsidized. In this case and in the one above, neither farmer lost out.
- 👉 The concept of food security – really talking about poverty and addressing issues of poverty and various – isms. This conversation is intersecting with other conversations in the state.

Is there a systemic approach to approaching second homeowners about farming their land?

- 👉 Approached homeowners after Irene. The reality is I felt myself as a "pet farmer." They wanted a picture of a farm, not the messy reality.
- 👉 [Land for Good](#)—this is part of our mission. Put together a guide for landowners about leasing their land to farmers. A lease has to be mutually beneficial. Consult with property owners and farmers about how to approach owners.

We want to be addressing the causes of poverty, community health, and farmers ability to keep farming.

- 👉 This junction of profit and not-profit . . . Nonprofits and educational institutions can implement and refine products and services for those who are food insecure. Then for-profits can use that information to make some money.
- 👉 Eisenhower quote – "If a problem cannot be solved, expand it." If the underlying issue to food insecurity is poverty, then playing field needs to expand. In CT, recently the [CT Food System Alliance](#) came to a convening of the Right from the Start initiative focused on economic and racial inequities in early childhood development. Need to bring networks together who are focused on poverty and/or economic development.
- 👉 A good resource on equity and economic development is [PolicyLink](#) and the [All in Nation](#) movement.
- 👉 Regarding conversation about preserving small parcels of land. Conservation easements can't be the only tool at our disposal. Act 250 does not apply to a lot of the development that happens in Vermont. One small thing we could, if we are going to mitigate on site, is to turn land into community gardens . . .
- 👉 Food systems planning issues – the location of the community gardens matters
- 👉 Remember how much Victory Gardens produced during World War II
- 👉 How do we change our messaging? How do we bring in unlikely partners?
- 👉 Need more of an assessment about food security and what is already happening.
- 👉 Look at European model of preserving land and soils just outside of cities.
- 👉 Inviting the 95% to Farm to Plate.

Takeaway Messages:

- 👉 **What does success look like? What are the big ideas on this topic? Do we need more Kingsbury Farms?**
- 👉 **Deepen connections between poverty and/or economic development communities to food access communities.**
- 👉 **Poverty and income distribution are at heart of issue. What do low income people want and need? There are gaps in our knowledge regarding how farms can provide to those communities.**
- 👉 **Need better understanding of land planning process; lack of perspective about how land can be utilized.**
- 👉 **To get prices lower you have to scale production up.**