

Rural Enterprise Case Study: Bread and Butter Farm

Overview of the Farm Business

Bread and Butter Farm is a community farm located on land in Shelburne and South Burlington, Vermont. The farm is a collaboration between two families and currently has four main enterprises: an on-farm bakery that produces whole grain, naturally fermented German breads (baked in a wood-fired oven); a 100% grass-fed beef operation; a diverse vegetable operation; and on-farm events, from educational programming to events like their popular Burger Night. In 2009, the farmers, Corie Pierce, Chris Dorman, and Adam Wilson, purchased the conserved property from the Vermont Land Trust and officially opened for business in mid-2010.

Land Use/Zoning Needs and Challenges

When Bread and Butter Farm submitted their proposal to the Vermont Land Trust and were chosen to purchase the farm, their plans of a multi-enterprise farm business seemed assured to the farmers. But as they got to work, they found out that some of these enterprises they had planned as part of their diversified operation like the bakery and on-farm events were not covered under the state's Required/Accepted Agricultural Practices (and therefore were not exempt from regulation) but were actually covered under land use regulations in their community. In order to move forward, they needed to go through a lengthy permitting process. In addition, the property is in two different municipalities so depending on the location of the activity, they would have to work with two different sets of land use regulations.



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Signage was another issue for Bread and Butter Farm. The driveway entrance for the farm is on property that is owned by a neighbor. They assumed that getting approval from the landowner to put up a sign on his property would be all that was required, but were rejected since the sign wasn't going to be located on their property. Working with the Vermont Land Trust and a lawyer, the farm went through a long municipal permitting process to get sign placement approved.

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Tips for Other Farmers

Get to know your neighbors and get their buy-in on your proposal if at all possible. Neighbors can sometimes make or break a project — providing support

for moving ahead within the municipality or putting up roadblocks. When Corie, Chris, and Adam moved to the farm, they shared with all their neighbors what they were planning and made sure that all the neighbors were comfortable with what was going on. This relationship building continues today and is something that they take great care to cultivate. For example, the farm sends an annual letter update about what's happened on the farm and what the plans for the upcoming year are. A key to this letter is acknowledging the impact they have on the neighborhood and sharing ideas they have for improvement. In addition, they invite their neighbors to their events — even providing free VIP passes, support businesses that their neighbors have, and utilize the expertise of retired farmer neighbors.

Other Things To Note

Bread and Butter Farm is governed by a conservation easement. This is one of many types of restrictions that address what land uses can happen on the farm. Approval from the easement holder for changes in land uses on the farm may be necessary, in addition to local land use review. Other regulations that might apply include those which regulate the processing of food by the Health Department, or requirements for managing wastewater from the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Even though insurance isn't necessarily a land use issue, your ability to get insurance to cover an enterprise can determine the viability of your enterprise. When you are in the planning stage, contact your insurance company to determine what the estimated costs of coverage will be. Knowing this in advance will be important to developing your business plan!

Bread & Butter Farm
www.breadandbutterfarm.com

