



# Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

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## House Committee on Agriculture & Forestry

Friday, January 27, 2017



## **VHCB Results: FY 2016 and FY 2017**

### *What we accomplished*

#### **2016**

State Investment: \$9.7M  
Leverage: \$60M

429 affordable housing units  
24 farms - 3,443 acres  
7 natural areas - 3,638 acres  
1 historic project  
80 Viability Program participants

#### **2017**

State Investment: \$9.6M  
Leverage: \$65M

411 affordable housing units  
25 farms – 2,860 acres  
10 natural areas - 1,100 acres  
1 historic project  
82 Viability Program participants



## **Title 10: Conservation and Development**

### **Chapter 15: VERMONT HOUSING AND CONSERVATION TRUST FUND**

#### **§ 302. Policy, findings, and purpose**

- (a) 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 are of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.

# Vermont's Nine Population-Level Quality of Life Outcomes

## 3 V.S.A. 45 § 2311

- (1) Vermont has a prosperous economy.
- (2) Vermonters are healthy.
- (3) Vermont's environment is clean and sustainable.
- (4) Vermont's communities are safe and supportive.
- (5) Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported.
- (6) Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential, including:
  - (A) Pregnant women and young people thrive.
  - (B) Children are ready for school.
  - (C) Children succeed in school.
  - (D) Youths choose healthy behaviors.
  - (E) Youths successfully transition to adulthood.
- (7) Vermont's elders and people with disabilities and people with mental conditions live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer.
- (8) Vermont has open, effective, and inclusive government at the State and local levels.
- (9) Vermont's State Infrastructure Meets the Needs of Vermonters, the Economy and the Environment

## VHCB PROGRAMS

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- Multi-Family Housing Development and Preservation
- Farmland Conservation
- Forestland, Recreational land and Natural Area Conservation
- Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program
- Home Ownership
- Farmland Access
- Home Access
- Vermont Lead Paint Hazard Abatement/Healthy Homes
- AmeriCorps
- Community Planning & Technical Assistance
- Historic Preservation
- Modular Housing Innovation Program
- Housing Opportunities for Persons living with HIV/AIDS



## Conserving working forests supports Vermont's forest-based economy sector

The Nature Conservancy photo

- Forests provide a backdrop for Vermont's world-class tourism industry and boost rural economies, as demonstrated by the Barre Town Forest, Mount Ascutney in West Windsor, and Kingdom Trails, all conserved with VHCB funding.
- The Vermont forest products industry contributes 10,555 jobs and \$1.5 billion in economic output, including value-added manufacturing and tourism.



In Ira and Poultney, The Conservation Fund protected 2,874 acres to be transferred to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department for addition to the Bird Mountain Wildlife Management Area. The acquisition protects a large unbroken tract for wildlife habitat, hunting, fishing and hiking in the Taconic Mountains and protects the headwaters of the Castleton, Poultney and Clarendon Rivers.



John G. Van Hoesen photo



## **Housing as a Community Catalyst** Turning blighted and underutilized properties into linchpins for economic development

A movie theater in Springfield, new housing created above the food co-op in Brattleboro, and a grocery store and new homes in Richford are examples of how VHCB investments help revitalize downtown and village centers.



Net zero energy capable modular home manufactured in Wilder by Vermod High Performance Homes. 34 homes have been placed across Vermont and 2 mobile home parks, one in Waltham and one in Hardwick, are replacing older mobile homes with Vermods with VHCB support.

## What was achieved:

### VHCB Farmland Conservation Investments, FY 16 – FY17

#### FY16:

- 24 farms (includes 2 retroactive OPAVs and 1 sugarbush)
- 3,443 acres
- 21 include water quality easement protections
- 4.25 miles riparian buffers
- 13 transfers: 7 to new farmers; 1 intergenerational, 5 to existing farmers

#### FY17:

- 25 farms (including 3 retroactive OPAVs)
- 2,860 acres
- 22 include water quality easement protections
- Almost 9 miles of riparian buffers
- 16 transfers: 6 to new farmers; 3 intergenerational, 7 to existing farmers

# VHCB Farmland Conservation

## 1987 - 2016

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- 672 farms – over 158,000 acres  
(183,000 acres total – 15% of VT's ag land)
- All farms in active ag production
- 11% of prime/statewide soils protected
- 400 farms include federal funding through NRCS
- 390 include the Option to Purchase at  
Agricultural Value (OPAV)

# LEAN Review of Farmland Conservation Program

Evaluation and improvement of process through which VHCB leverages federal funds and works with the Agency of Agriculture and conservation nonprofits to purchase development rights on farms.





## Conservation is Key to Water Quality

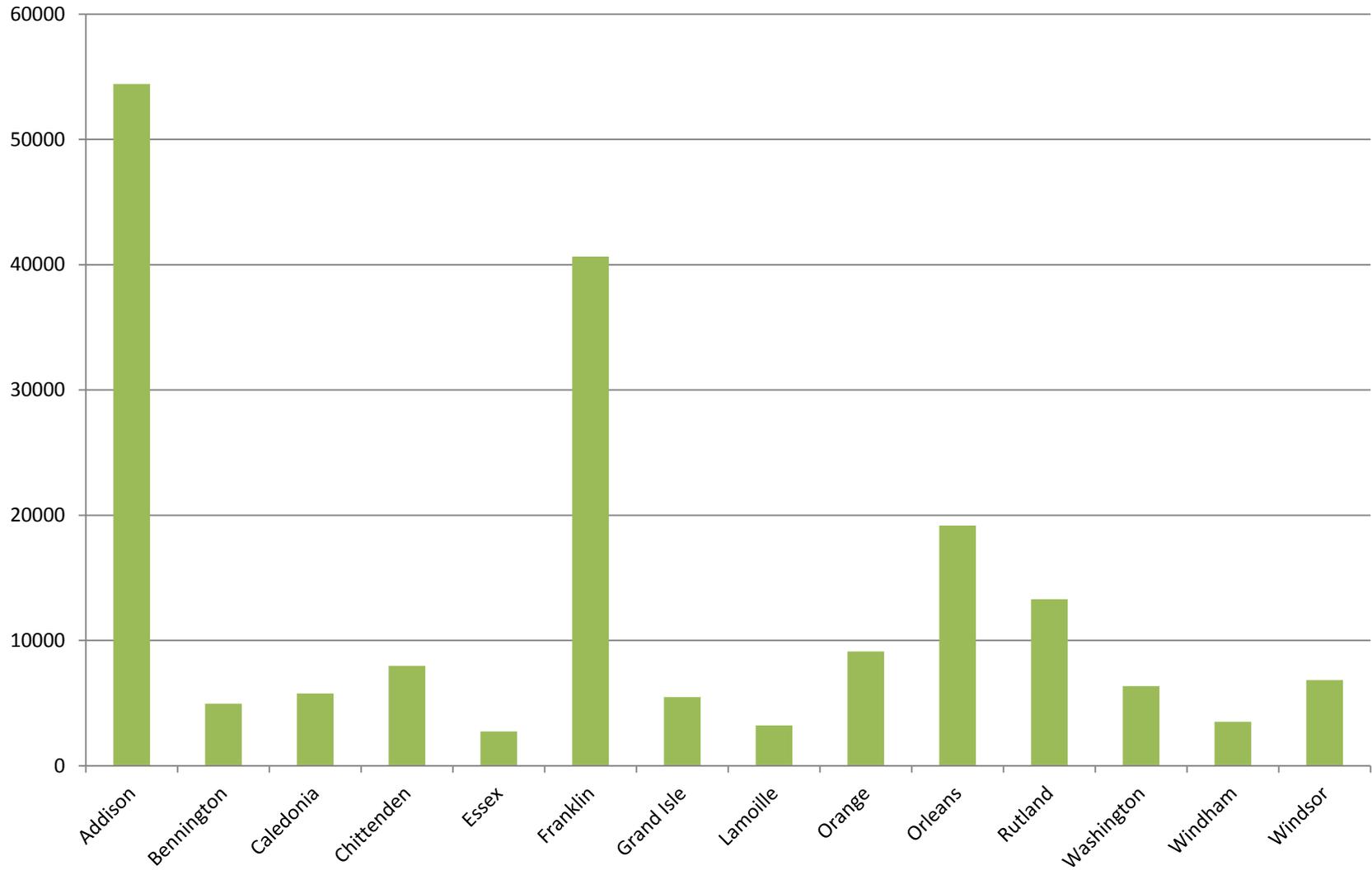
Vermont's lakes and rivers are critical assets that support a \$2.5 billion tourism industry. Protecting and restoring natural infrastructure – river floodplains, wetlands, and riparian forests – will help offset the 20-year, \$1.25 billion cost gap in reducing pollution.\*

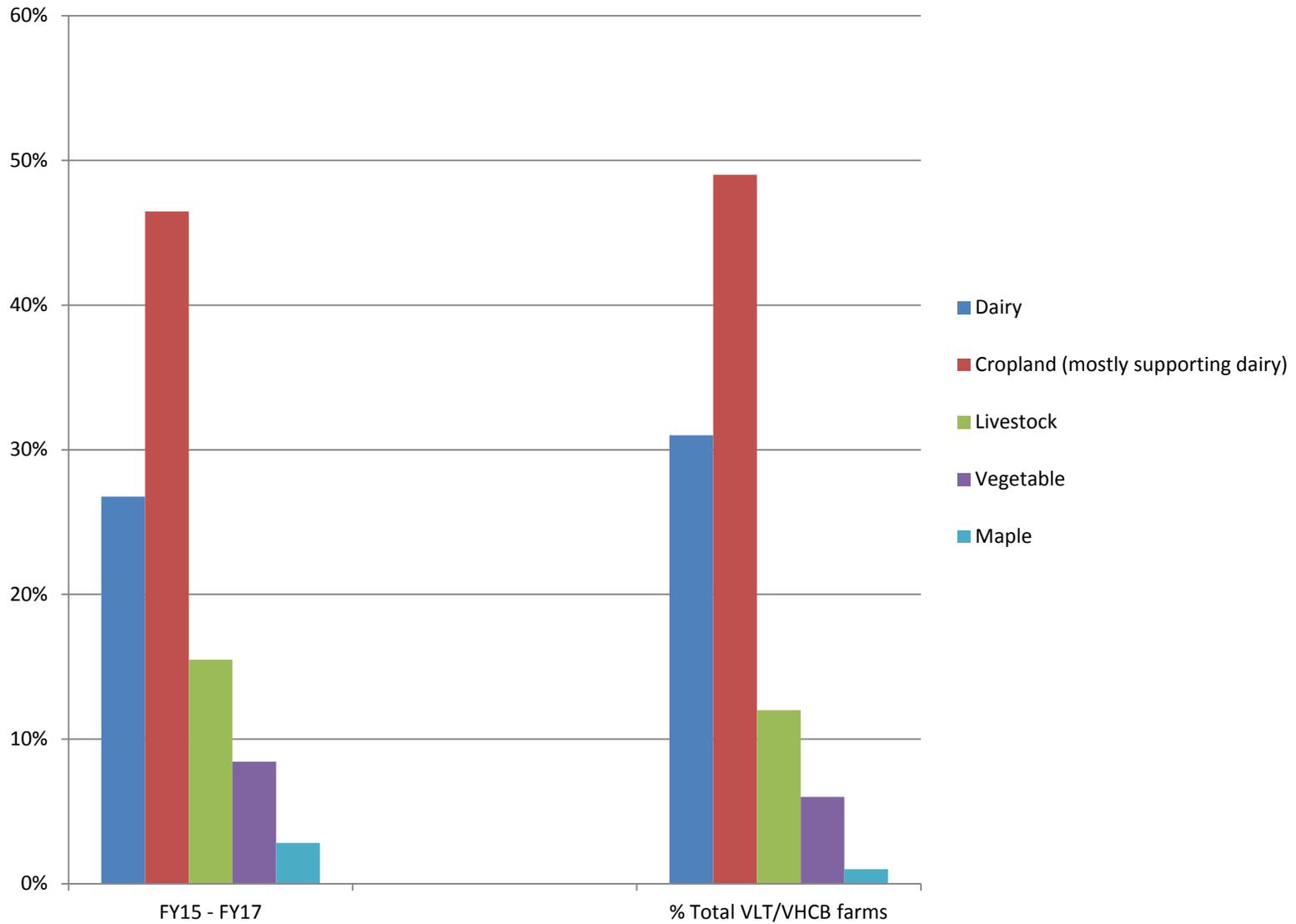
Conservation is a cost-effective strategy in delivering clean water, providing flood resilience and driving down compliance costs. The economic impact of water quality on property values has been quantified: In 2015 the Georgia grand list dropped by \$1.8M due to reassessments of 37 lakeside properties with declining water quality.

“Securing these benefits will further justify the use of public funds for land conservation and protection.” - \*Report on Clean Water, Vermont State Treasurer, January, 2017

There are significant economic and environmental values to riparian buffers on farmland. Two-thirds of the farms conserved by VHCB the past 2 fiscal years are located in the Lake Champlain Basin, and all the farms containing surface waters have water quality protections in the easement, including over 13 miles of riparian buffers.

## Total Acres by County





**Ag Activities on conserved farms**

# Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Matching federal funds focused on Water Quality



## **Randall farm, Lowell**

- organic, grass-based dairy
  - extensive Missisquoi River frontage
  - 212 acres conserved in 2016, with the Vermont Land Trust
- 
- Easement includes riparian buffer on nearly a mile and a half of Missisquoi River frontage
  - Special protection of 30 acres of diverse wetlands, with open water, marshland, forested wetlands, and swamps.

## Richardson farm, Hartland

- Vermont Century Farm, award-winning Jersey herd and maple operation;
- In partnership with the Upper Valley Land Trust, protected both the dairy and sugarbush (one of VHCB's first sugarbush projects);
- Selling development rights facilitated a family transfer, with a goal of a future intergenerational transfer
- Viability participants

# Marc & Cheryl Cesario - Meeting Place Pastures, Cornwall



- **Purchased conserved farm in 2009**
- **Bought additional land simultaneous with conservation in 2016, working with VLT**
- **Viability participant in 2012, working with NOFA-VT**

# VHCB and Farm to Plate

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VHCB's mission to protect working lands and support farm and ag-related businesses supports several Farm2Plate goals:

- Agricultural land will be available, affordable and conserved
- Farms will improve environmental stewardship
- Production of local foods will increase
- Farms will be profitable
- Business planning and technical services will be coordinated and accessible



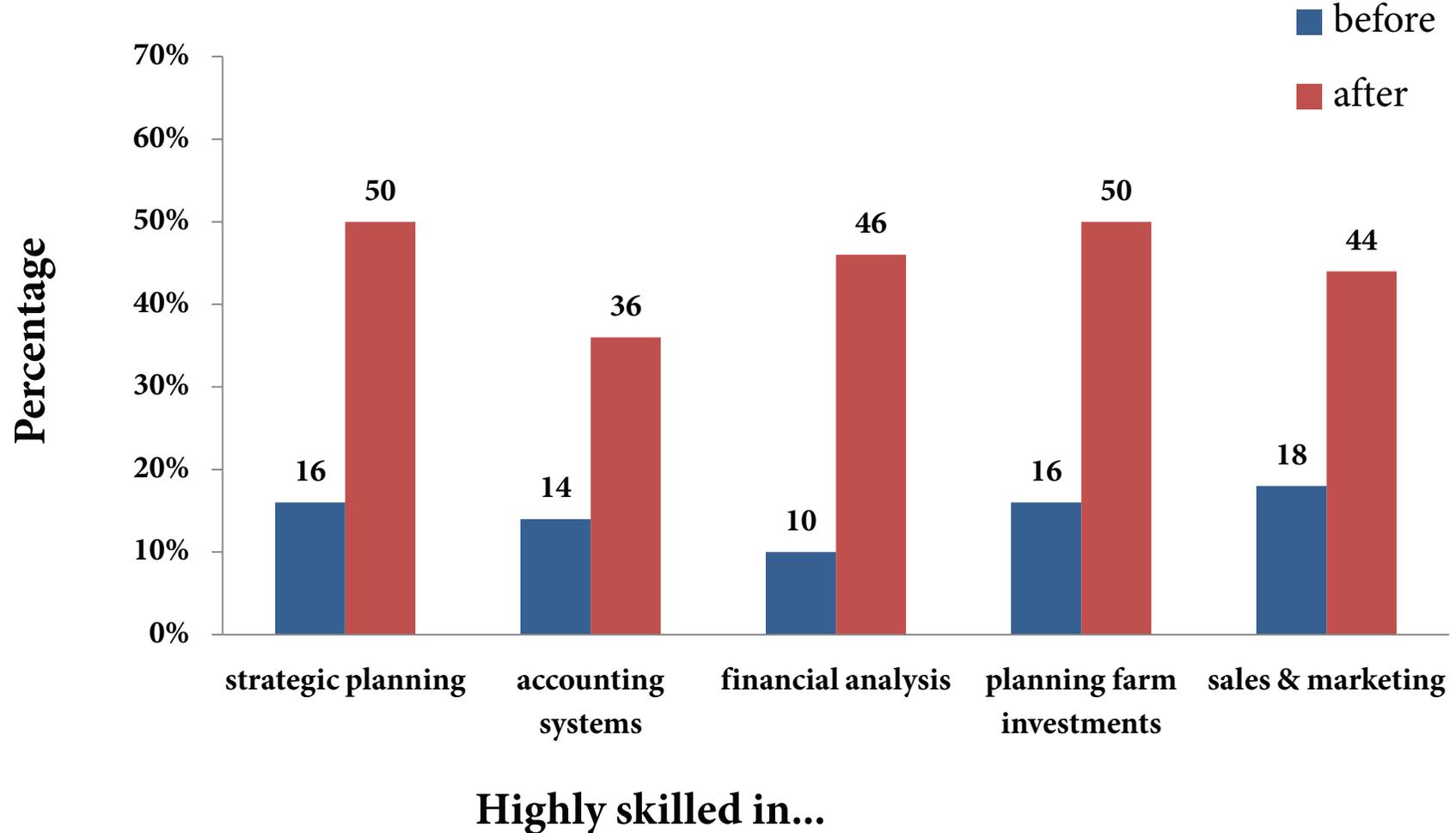
## VT Farm & Forest Viability Program

### Program Outcomes

- Identifying and meeting business goals
- Increasing business management skills: decision-making and financial record-keeping and analysis
- Implementing business expansions, generational or ownership transfers, and other transitions
- Increasing profits
- Accessing financing and other sources of capital
- Improving quality of life



## Increase in Participants' Management Skills





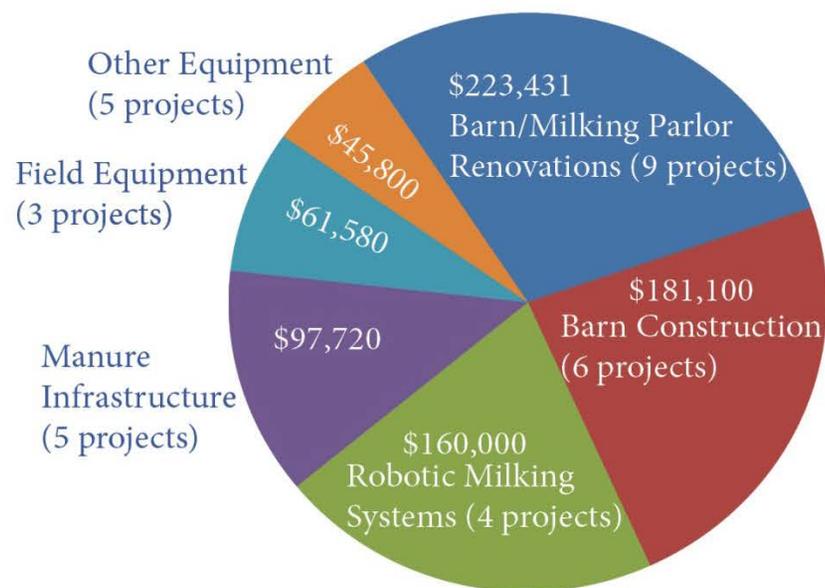
## 2014-2016 Dairy Improvement Grants

32 projects funded

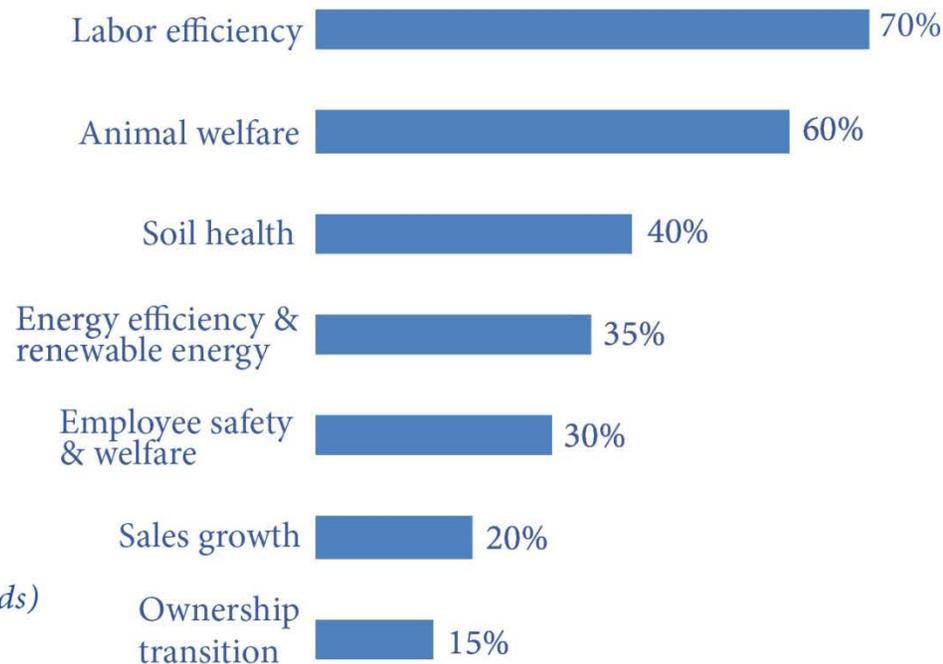
\$796,631 awarded  
(32% of requests)

\$3,464,254 leveraged  
(4.3 to 1)

### Types of projects funded...



### Percent of projects with improvements in...



*\*Seventeen of the 32 projects (and 51% of granted funds) will result in water quality improvements.*



## Sweetland Farm, Norwich

Norah Lake owns Sweetland Farm, a diversified vegetable and livestock farm in Norwich. She worked with the Viability Program to improve her financial planning, production efficiency, and marketing to increase the sustainability of her CSA business. After farming for years in Hartland, Norah moved in 2015 onto conserved land in Norwich, securing her land base and strengthening the business. She is working with VLT to buy and conserve additional land, to grow the business.



## **Providence Dairy, Addison**

Jonathan and Maryann Conner operate a conserved dairy farm, and enrolled in the Viability Program in 2015 to work on improving efficiencies and transitioning to a grazing based herd. They worked with consultant Mike Ghia, and Cheryl Cesario at UVM Extension, to develop a grazing plan, and a way to finance needed improvements, such as lane ways and perimeter fencing. Now, if they want to transition to organic, they'll be ready.



## **Orb Weaver Farm, Monkton**

Marjorie Susman and Marian Polack have operated Orb Weaver Farm, 103 acres in Monkton, for the past 35 years. A unique business, it is a successful, nationally-renowned, award-winning, small-scale cheese operation that also grows vegetables in the summer for the Middlebury co-op. Working with VLT, they conserved the farm in 2013. Sam Smith, business advisor at the Intervale Center, and Rose Wilson helped them develop a long-term business plan including examining options for ownership succession.

**“Having a neutral, non-family member involved made it easier to digest some things that might be hard to hear.”**

**– Jim Starr**



**“This process pushed us to make important decisions and not put them off.” – Virgil Starr**

## **Starr Family, Forestland Owners, North Troy**

Four generations of the Starr family from North Troy, pictured above, worked with adviser Audrey Winograd through the Vermont Woodlands Association on a forestland succession plan. Nearly 300 acres situated at the confluence of Buybee Brook and the Missisquoi River, their forestland is actively managed for timber, acts as a densely forested buffer, helps maintain forest integrity, and provides a wildlife corridor. Winograd facilitated large family meetings on the subject of succession and helped the family understand the legal tools available to them.



## **LSF Forest Products, Fletcher**

Tyler Riggs owns LSF Forest Products with his father – a small pine and hemlock sawmill in Fletcher that serves and supplies builders, farms, landscapers and a local wooden cask business. The business is on a steady growth trajectory from milling 400,000 board feet in 2016 towards a million board feet in the new few years. Tyler is working with UVM Extension forest business advisor Chris Lindgren to develop a plan to manage this growth and improve profitability.

## Historic Preservation – Chester Academy



The Chester Academy Building is a cultural and scenic landmark on the village green. A variety of community activities take place on the grounds of this historic building and it is part of a larger effort to rehabilitate and improve other prominent building in Chester's historic village center



This home, built by Brattleboro Habitat for Humanity Chapter, is on a lot donated by The Nature Conservancy at their 553-acre Black Mountain Natural Area. The energy efficient home abuts several other house lots. The home belongs to a family with kids who can enjoy the proximity to the West River, a nearby swimming hole and a trail leading to the summit of Black Mountain.

# BURLINGTON COLLEGE LAND CAMBRIAN RISE HOUSING MASTER PLAN



Architect's illustration of proposed housing – a mixed income development with 700 new homes composed of family rental, senior housing and homeownership condominiums.



## Housing for Workers

4 out of 5 of households in VHCB/LIHTC rental homes are employed\*

Damaged by Tropical Storm Irene, this former state office building was restored and expanded to create 27 affordable apartments, home to residents working in health care, retail, restaurants, and for the State of Vermont.

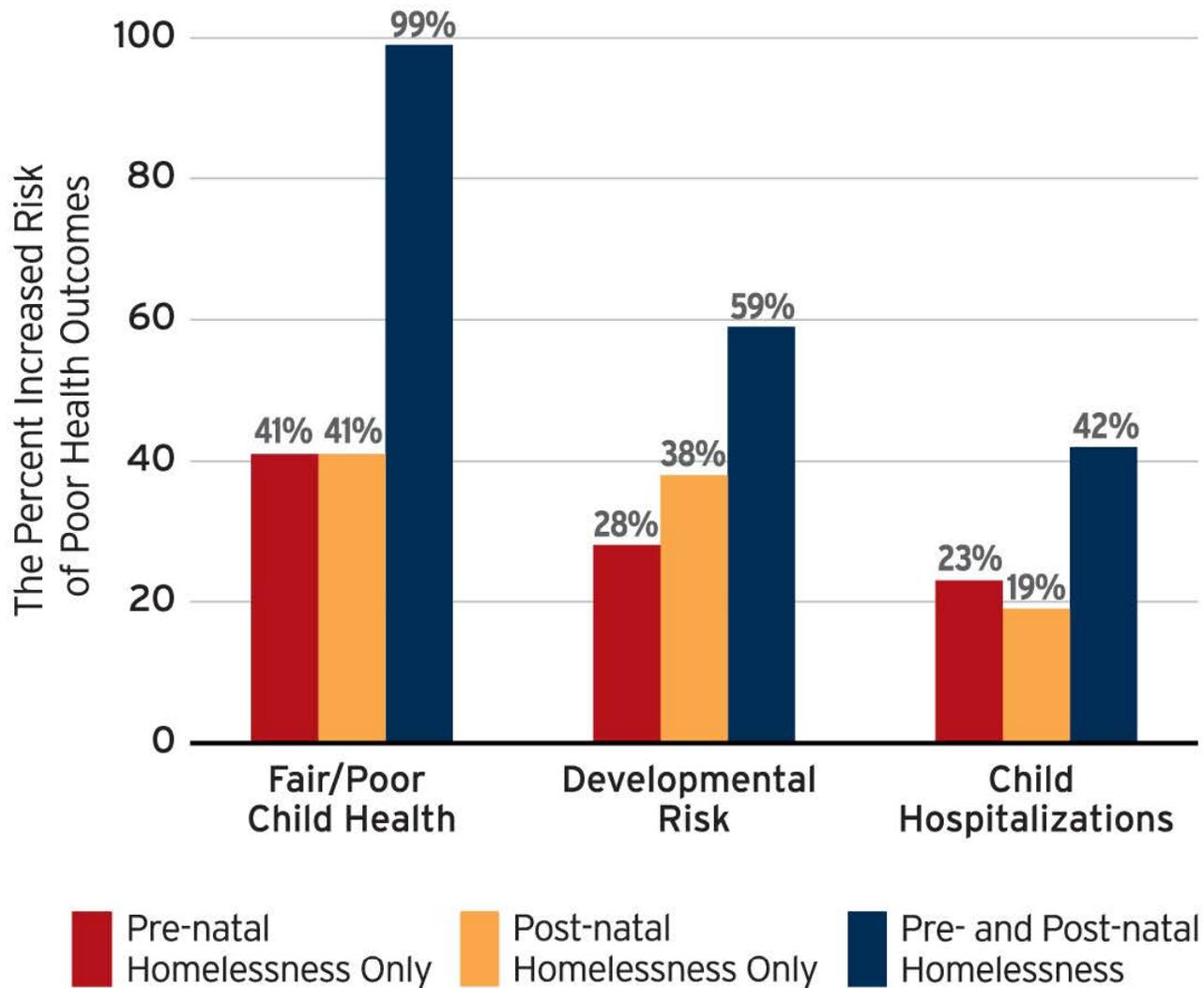
\*does not include seniors or those with a disability; source: Vermont Housing Finance Agency

# Safford Commons in Woodstock

## 28 Apartments in a New Affordable Neighborhood



FIGURE 1  
Compounding Effect of Homelessness on Child Health



The comparison group for these data is children who were never homeless.

All findings statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Source: Children's HealthWatch Data, May 2009-December 2014.



## Housing Helps Solve Community Problems

On Summer Street in Barre, Downstreet Housing & Community Development and Housing Vermont turned blighted property into 27 new apartments with community meeting space and offices for Downstreet.

With a \$20,000 grant from VHCB, the City of Newport has begun planning for the redevelopment of the vacant block in the heart of its downtown.



## Future Opportunities as of October 2016

### 12-18 Month Pipeline of VHCB Applications

#### Housing

Proposals to develop or rehabilitate 1,408 affordable homes seeking \$30 million in VHCB and HOME Program funding

#### Conservation

- 40 farmland conservation applications seeking \$10 million to conserve 6,282 acres
- 36 historic buildings seeking \$2 million for restoration
- 63 conservation projects seeking \$7 million to protect 11,000 acres of forestland, natural areas and recreational lands
- 150 farm and forestry businesses seeking \$1.8 million in business planning and technical assistance

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