

# Farmland Access



**House Committee on Agriculture & Forestry**  
**Senate Agriculture Committee**

February 5, 2020



# VHCB and Farmland Access

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**Statutory mission:** Protect farmland and keep conserved farmland in active production and affordable to farmers

**Policy goal:** Prioritize projects that facilitate transfers to new and existing farmers

More than half of all farm conservation projects facilitate transfers:

- Generally, about half of transfers are to new farmers/family members, and half are to existing operations
- Viability program works with Vermont Land Trust to support succession planning and new/beginning farmers



## Helping Young Farmers onto the Land with Conservation and Business Planning Support

Over the past 3 years, the Viability Program served 199 newly enrolled farm businesses. One third received transfer/succession planning services.

Through a USDA Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Grant, VHCB, VLT and the Intervale Center assisted:

- 175 beginning & retiring farmers
- 82 farmers received land access coaching; 38 secured land
- 62 retiring farmers coached in succession planning



## Farmland Access – Challenges

- 92% of VT farmers aged 65+ have no one younger than 45 working with them
- Majority of farms have no succession plan
- Average age of Vermont farmers is 57.3
- Rapidly changing marketplace for agricultural products; limited farm profitability and changing business models
- Retiring farmers need income, housing; harder to transition a business that is not profitable
- Cost of farmland and infrastructure high relative to profitability of ag business models



## Farmland Access: Opportunities

- VHCB Farmland Conservation: majority of projects facilitate farmland transfers, reducing purchase price to buyers
- VLT Farmland Access Program and VHCB Farm & Forest Viability Program: supporting new and retiring farmers working on intergenerational transfers
- New sources of capital, financing and land use models in development
- Coordinated market development/Ag planning:  
VT Agriculture and Food System Plan: 2020



## Farmland Access – Recommendations

- **Double Farmland Access Capacity:** Double the number of retiring and beginning farmers assisted by VLT and VHCB
- **Emerging Markets:** Increase support for emerging products and markets through business assistance, applied research, market analysis, and benchmarking for products from hemp and grains to grass-fed beef and milk. Professional development on new markets.
- **Payment for Ecosystem Services:** Compensate farmers for the stewardship of our natural resources.

# Conservation Easements & the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value: How it works

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- Easement value equals difference between the farm's current appraised value and the value restricted to agricultural use with the OPAV.
- The OPAV resale restriction only applies to sales to non-farmers/non-family
- New farmers buy farm at appraised "after" value, making purchase affordable
- At least half of all conservation easement projects facilitate transfers
- Retroactive OPAVs: another farm transfer tool

# Vermont Farmland Conservation Impacts



- 746 farms, 164,000 acres conserved with VHCB \$\$
- Approximately 460 farms utilized \$58 million in NRCS funding
- 12% of prime and statewide agricultural soils protected
- 20% of agricultural land conserved
- Focus on blocks of farmland in strong agricultural communities
- About 1/2 of all recent projects facilitate transfers to new owners

# Connections to Climate & Water Quality



- Viable farm businesses can invest in soil health and regenerative agricultural practices.
- In FY19, the Viability Program granted \$702,377 to 22 farms for water quality infrastructure improvements, leveraging \$5.3 million.
- Farm conservation projects include special restrictions protecting riparian buffers and wetlands.
- Natural resource projects protect shoreline, rivers and headwaters.
- Farm retirement projects underway
- Governor Scott's Vermont Climate Action Commission called for increased investment in land conservation through VHCB.



# Conservation and Water Quality

## **Poulin and Daughters Family Farm, Randolph**

VLT farmland access project conserved with VHCB funding in 2013. Beef and maple farm with 50-foot riparian buffer along Third Branch of the White River. VHCB water quality grant in 2017 to install manure containment structures.



# Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

## Matching federal funds focused on Water Quality

### Marquis Farm, Newport Center

90-cow organic dairy on Route 100 in Missisquoi watershed

- Grass-based organic dairy purchased in 2011 from uncle
- 124-acre parcel conserved in 2015; 122-acre home farm conserved in 2017
- Located in Missisquoi watershed (critical source area for phosphorous loading); easement includes riparian buffers
- Farm needed manure pit, barnyard, ditching, laneways, pasture watering system—all installed in 2017-19, with NRCS funding

# New Owners Helped onto the Land

## Ag Enterprises Diversified and Strengthened

The Viability Program secured a 3-year federal grant from USDA for education and technical assistance to the next generation of farmers, supporting added capacity at the Intervale Center and VLT for succession/farmland access

A \$624,000 grant from the Northern Borders Regional Commission will be used to launch a 4-state Northeast business assistance program.



**Eugenia Doyle and Sam Burr with their son, Silas Burr-Doyle, who is taking over operation and ownership of Last Resort Farm, conserved in 1991.**



# Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

- 17 years of in-depth advising
- 850 farm, food & forest products businesses served
- 1/3 of clients engaged in transfer or succession planning

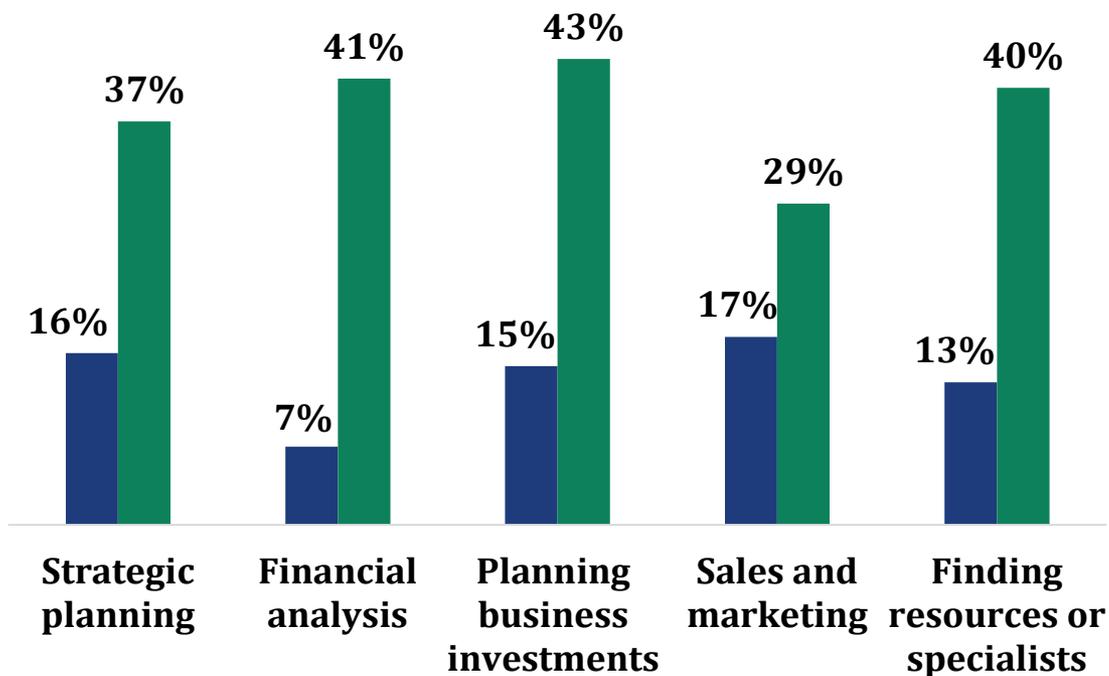




# Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

*Percent of Farmers who Report High Skills in:*

- Before participation
- After participation





# Honey Field Farm Norwich



“The entire agricultural service provider community is really well connected—we really felt they had our backs and it was so comforting to know we had so many allies to reach out to at each stage of the process.

If you’re ready to take the next step in the future of your business, only good things can come from working with the Viability Program.”

— Eli Hersh & Valerie Woodhouse

# Golden Russet Farm Shoreham



“We had clarity about Pauline taking over the farm, but what was unclear was how to make that happen. Working with the Viability Program has the ball rolling, which it wouldn’t have without Mike’s guidance.

We feel that we are on the path to ensuring a successful intergenerational family transition to our daughter that will be both profitable for her and rewarding for us.”

— Judy & Will Stevens

# Stickney Farm

## Rockingham



“Working with Kevin was a tremendous help. Through planning we’ve been able to make our business more efficient and cost effective, and are now expanding operations.”

— Robert Stickney

# Helping Young Vermonters onto the Land



Karin Bellemare and her partner Jon Wagner-Hebert returned to Vermont and purchased, conserved and started a new ag business – Bear Roots Farm in South Barre & Williamstown with help from VLT's Farm Access Program and VHCB funding.



# Helping Young Vermonters Build Businesses



Donegan Farm, Hinesburg | Laughing Child Farm, Pawlet | Full Belly Farm, Monkton  
LSF Forest Products, Fletcher | Sweet Rowan Farmstead, West Glover | Pigasus Meats, South Hero



## Rural Economic Development Initiative Grants

FY18-19: \$150,000 in special appropriations for grant writing has helped 16 rural enterprises and small towns win \$2.3M in federal, state, and philanthropic funding.

Funded projects include:

- Broadband expansion in Readsboro
- Revitalizing a community general store in Albany
- Outdoor recreation investment in the Northeast Kingdom
- Wood processing infrastructure in Kirby

# Community Center in Bridgewater



REDI support won a \$30,000 VCDP grant to redevelop a historic school building into a community center with childcare and space for local businesses. The new childcare facility is expected to open in 2020.

***“Assistance through the REDI program was key to our successful grant application. As a volunteer organization, we couldn’t have managed the application and follow-up process without support.”***

— Hank Smith, Bridgewater Area Community Foundation



## Northeast Alliance of Ag Business Assistance Providers

- **Mission:** Increase the number and economic viability of farm and food businesses in New England and the New York Hudson Valley region.
- **Purpose:** Ensure consistent and equal access to high-quality business technical assistance for farm and food businesses.
- **Goal:** Establish and sustain a strong, diverse, interstate alliance of business technical assistance providers that facilitates **professional development, networking, and advocacy** opportunities for members while **cultivating a pipeline of future service providers** and **securing resources** to benefit the entire alliance.



# Thank you!



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[www.vhcb.org](http://www.vhcb.org)

Gus Seelig, Nancy Everhart, Ela Chapin



[www.vlt.org](http://www.vlt.org)

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