



farm to plate

2018 Annual Report



Table of Contents

Letter to the General Assembly and Governor | *page 01*

Progress toward Legislative Goals | *page 02*

Network Progress in Five Priority Areas

1 Meeting Food System Employment Needs in Positive Work Environments | *page 04*

2 Improving Viability of Farms and Food Businesses | *page 06*

3 Increasing Local Food Availability and Affordability in All Market Channels | *page 08*

4 Increasing Consumer Engagement and Demand for Local Food | *page 10*

5 Protecting and Expanding Affordable and Environmentally Sustainable Farmland in Agricultural Production | *page 12*

Administrative

The Value of the Network | *page 15*

Farm to Plate Network Leadership | *page 16*

Network at a Glance | *page 17*

The Gathering | *page 18*

Financials | *page 20*

Funding Partners | *page 20*

About Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund | *page 21*

Staff | *page 21*

To: Vermont General Assembly and Governor Phil Scott

Achieving Intended Outcomes

The enabling legislation for Vermont Farm to Plate created a 10-year time horizon spanning 2010 to 2020 for the creation and implementation of a statewide food system plan. As Farm to Plate concludes its eighth full year and approaches 2020, there is strong recognition that we have made major progress in implementing priority strategies and achieving the objectives identified in the plan. For example, since 2010:

- Purchases of local food in Vermont have increased by \$176 million to **\$289 MILLION IN TOTAL (12.9% OF TOTAL FOOD SALES)**.
- **6,559 NET NEW JOBS AND 742 NET NEW BUSINESSES** have been created.
- The percentage of food insecure Vermont households has **DROPPED TO 9.8% FROM 13.2%**.

While the enabling legislation requested the release of a strategic plan in 2010, it also had the foresight to recognize that with changing conditions the plan may need periodic review and updates. Over the course of our collective implementation efforts, Farm to Plate Network members have surfaced new challenges and opportunities not identified in the original plan, many of which will require action beyond 2020. Additionally, the paper **A 2018 EXPLORATION OF THE FUTURE OF VERMONT AGRICULTURE: IDEAS TO SEED A CONVERSATION AND A CALL TO ACTION**, recently released by a number of food system thought leaders, identifies Farm to

Plate as a logical vehicle for carrying out the exploration and development of new strategies and ideas identified by the authors.

The need for continuing coordination and resources beyond 2020 to address emergent challenges and opportunities in Vermont's food system naturally poses the question: how does the Farm to Plate Network continue to develop responses and implement future projects in light of its 2020 end date? Over the summer, Farm to Plate staff and Steering Committee members asked Network members as well as farm and food leaders for candid, critical feedback as to whether a new plan is needed and if the Farm to Plate Network should continue past 2020. Of the 128 food system non-profit, business, academic institution, funder, and government agency stakeholders we spoke to, **92 PERCENT RESPONDED THAT, YES, VERMONT FARM TO PLATE SHOULD CONTINUE.**

Respondents overwhelmingly felt that it is essential to have a plan which establishes a common vision and agenda with updated action steps and strategies, and that a reauthorization of Vermont Farm to Plate from the Legislature sends an important message that the Vermont General Assembly and Governor of Vermont believe that continued food system development is important to our state's economic, social and environmental future. We believe the time for renewal is now; there is still much to be done.

With this feedback from food system stakeholders, we come to the Legislature not only to report on the latest year of progress, but also to ask to open a new chapter and decade of Farm to Plate's existence by reauthorizing the Farm to Plate Investment Program for another 10 years. Our hope is that this year's Annual Report begins to outline the challenges, opportunities, and approaches Farm to Plate will focus on now and into the decade to come.

Jake Claro
Farm to Plate Director

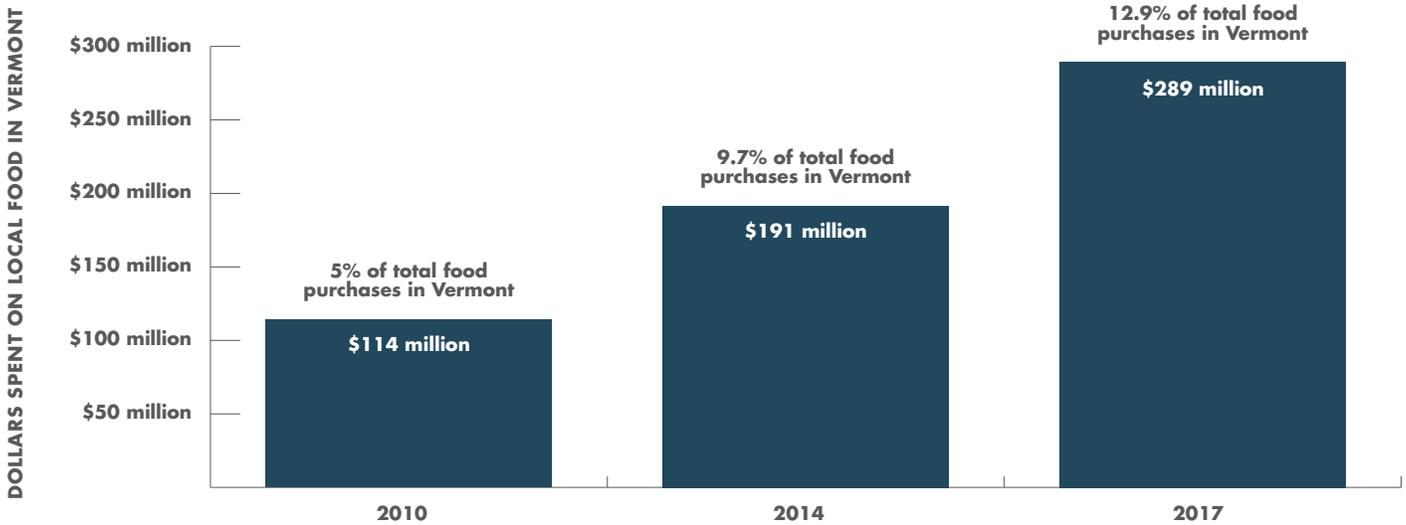
"What Farm to Plate can bring to the table is non-comparable to a state agency, and there is value to not being inside state government. Farm to Plate has more than demonstrated the importance of networking and within their work has taught the importance of working across sectors. There is no time like the present to continue the work of Farm to Plate; especially with the topics of business viability, marketability, climate change and ecosystem benefits at the forefront."

Alyson Eastman
Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

Progress toward Legislative Goals

Legislative Goal 1:

Increase Economic Development in Vermont's Farm and Food Sector



In 2010, Farm to Plate set a target of 10% local food consumption by 2020. In 2017 the target was surpassed, with 12.9% of total food and beverage purchases in Vermont spent on local products. Reaching the target is cause for celebration, but there is still more work to be done.

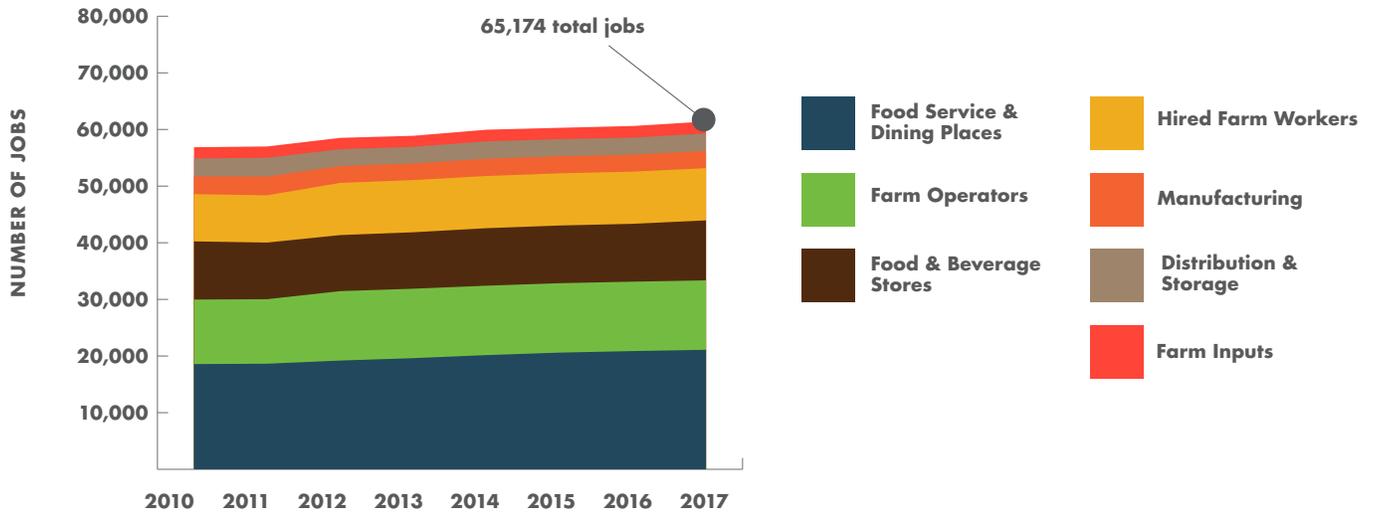
Source: David Conner & Ethan Thompson, University of Vermont, 2017.

By the Numbers



* Direct to consumer may include CSAs, farmer's markets, farm stands, brewery tap rooms.

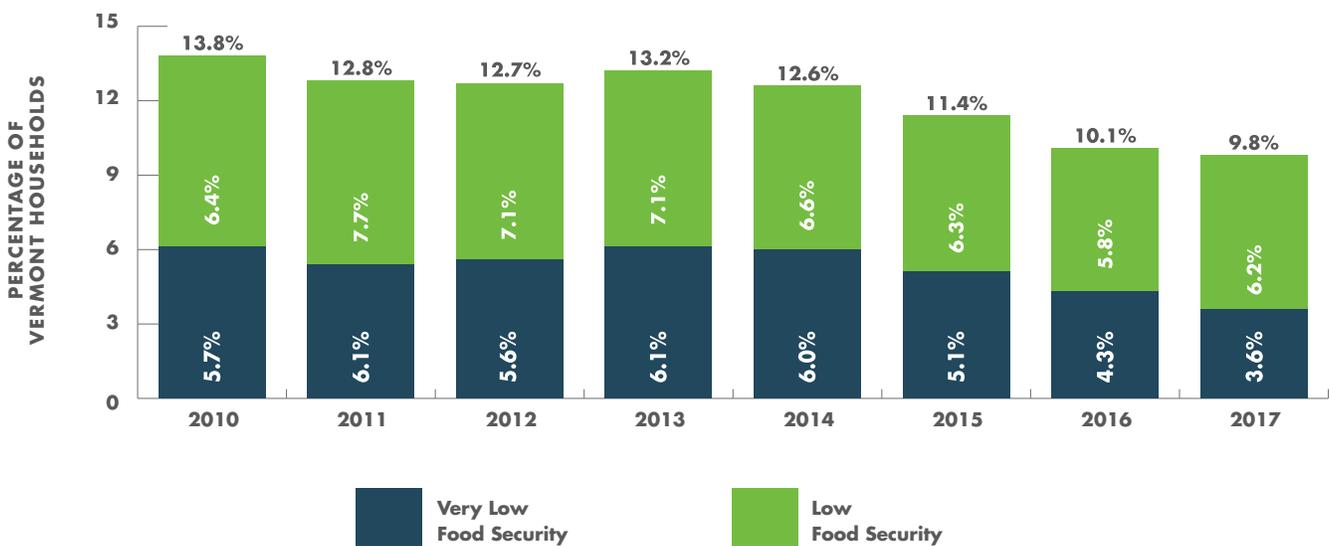
Legislative Goal 2: Create Jobs in the Farm and Food Economy



6,559 net new jobs were created by food sector businesses in Vermont from 2010–2017.

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics, and USDA Census of Agriculture.

Legislative Goal 3: Improve Access to Healthy, Local Food for All Vermonters



9.8% of Vermont households faced “Food Insecurity” in 2017, down from 13.8% in 2010.

Source: USDA Economic Research Service

* “Food-insecure” households (those with low and very low food security) had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. (USDA).

1

Meeting Food System Employment Needs in Positive Work Environments



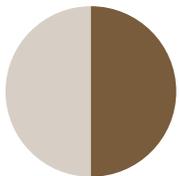
Network Involvement

Working Groups: Education and Workforce Development; Production and Processing

Task Forces: Career Pathways & Image; Workforce Development, Education, & Business Partnership

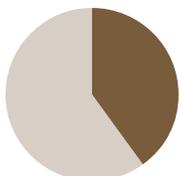
The food and agriculture sector is an economic success story for Vermont: since 2010, 6,559 net new jobs have been created throughout the food system.

However, the food system is still susceptible to the same workforce challenges faced by other sectors in the state, and the Farm to Plate Network hears repeatedly from all types of businesses – from farms to independent grocers – that finding and retaining employees is one of their greatest struggles and a barrier to expansion.



50%

of large employers say hiring challenges hold back their businesses.



40%

of small employers say hiring challenges hold back their businesses.

Tackling Multiple Challenges

In 2013, the Education and Workforce Development Working Group produced [Charting a Path: Food System Workforce Needs Assessment](#), which is still relevant in 2018. The Working Group developed projects to implement the strategies identified in the report, and these projects—and the partnerships that have stemmed from them—continue to evolve in response to the persistent workforce development challenges.

First, there remains a need to build interest in food system careers, both among potential employees, but also among educators and cross-sector workforce development professionals. This includes efforts to reduce the stigma around food system careers and to have them seen as viable career pathways. It also includes broadening public understanding of the complexity of the food system and the wide range of careers involved.

Second, there remains a significant skills gap even after individuals express interest in food system careers, due to both a lack of awareness of what skills are needed, and a lack of opportunities to actually learn those skills. Much of the Network's recent work is in improving systems for the prospective workforce to identify and develop the necessary skills for food system careers.

Source: *Charting a Path: Food System Workforce Needs Assessment*.

Lastly, no matter how successful the food and agriculture sector is in building interest and providing training, there remain broader structural barriers that affect the workforce in every sector in Vermont: transportation, housing, childcare, healthcare, and structural inequality, among many others. Each of the Network's projects must account for these challenges and address them where possible.

Building Excitement and Creating Connectivity



Students from the Sustainable Ag program at Randolph Technical Career Center, the Culinary Program at the Randolph Technical Career Center, and the Diversified Ag program at Central Vermont Career Center, learn about food system careers from a panel of local food system entrepreneurs.

The **Career Profiles Project** has been a primary project of the Education and Workforce Development Working Group over the past four years. This project provides a way for students at high schools and tech centers to explore a wide range of careers through interviews with food system professionals in their community. The Task Force is continuously expanding the project. In 2018, the Task Force also created a career guide with detailed information on different types of food system jobs, began a collaboration with VAAFM to organize career panels for classrooms and career fairs, and provided design input for a student symposium held by Sodexo's Vermont First program. This collection of related work has proven effective at raising Vermont students' awareness of food system career options, and also awareness of the skills required for each job and where they can develop those skills.

"The Vermont Farm to Plate team is a critical partner focusing on growing our economy. The Agency of Agriculture is working closely with Vermont Farm to Plate, engaging students and those considering a job in agriculture. It's important work as we all pull in the same direction of making Vermont more affordable and taking care of those that are most vulnerable."

Secretary Anson Tebbetts
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM)

A second key multi-year project has been the **Workforce-Education-Business Partnerships** (WEBs). In the WEB model, members of the Working Group design and host a series of local events to bring together workforce development organizations, educators, and food system businesses, at the county level. In 2018, members of the Working Group coordinated WEBs in three different counties—Washington, Lamoille, and Bennington. These

local networks have increased awareness among educators and workforce development organizations of the impact and needs of food system business in their service areas, and have brokered introductions between the players able to create local training solutions. The information gleaned from the WEBs is continuously reported to the Working Group to inform group members' individual programming and to guide the group's strategy.



Northeast Kingdom educators receive a tour of the Vermont Food Venture Center as part of the Lamoille WEB project.

An Essential Ingredient in Farm Viability

Because the current workforce challenges deeply impact business viability and succession, they permeate the Farm to Plate Network. In 2016, the Production and Processing Working Group and the Farmland Access and Stewardship Working Group began joint conversations around farm succession, and identified a need for better mentorship and training for potential successors. The groups identified the nationwide **Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship** as a program that could help address this challenge. Vermont historically had a number of prospective Master Grazers but no state-specific Education Coordinator. After conversations within the Network and fundraising by UVM Extension, UVM Extension was able in August 2018 to hire Vermont's first Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Education Coordinator, and several groups within the Network look forward to helping grow the program.

>> Looking Ahead

These ongoing initiatives have proven extremely valuable, and the Network will continue to manage, adapt, and expand them over the next few years. Increasingly, however, the Network is also discussing sector-neutral systemic barriers (e.g., affordable housing, transportation, childcare, etc.) that these projects help bring to the surface. The more the Network learns about these barriers and builds relevant cross-sector partnerships, the more individual Network members are able to account for them in their own programmatic work.

2

Improving Viability of Farms and Food Businesses



Network Involvement

Working Groups: Production and Processing; Aggregation and Distribution

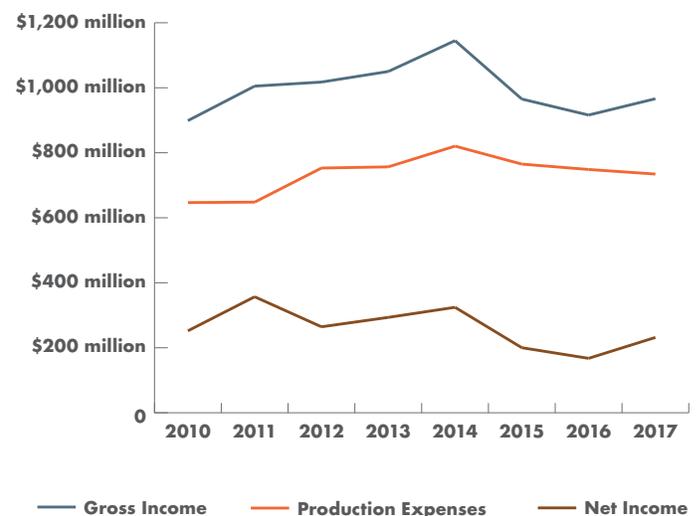
Cross-Cutting Teams: Financing

Task Forces: Business Viability Indicators; Slow Money Vermont

The Network's efforts to improve farm and food business viability is in direct response to both addressing changes in the dairy industry and the urgent need to develop financially viable models and enterprises for other types of production.

In doing so, Vermont's agricultural economy will be less exposed to systemic risks spreading through a crisis in one particular industry (e.g., less risk of losing land to development permanently, infrastructure and support services that benefit all types of agriculture, public investment). The historical, and still prevalent, presence of dairy as an agricultural driver exposes the state's agricultural economy to myriad vulnerabilities, particularly in the face of low and stagnant milk prices and an aging demographic of farm operators without identified successors that own substantial land and infrastructure assets. The need to develop viable enterprises for other types of agricultural production that can utilize the larger land base of current dairies grows by the day as projected adverse market conditions will continue to exacerbate existing challenges in Vermont's dairy industry.

Vermont Net Farm Income



After modest increases from 2010 to 2014, net farm income has since stagnated and decreased by approx. \$20 million in comparison to 2010, likely reflecting struggles in the dairy market but also increasingly competitive markets in other agricultural industries. Source: USDA ERS Farm Income and Wealth Statistics.

Market-based and financial viability challenges are not unique or exclusive to dairy production. In fact, despite market challenges, dairy farms are still more likely than any other type of farm to report net gains in income, and 8 of the 12 production categories defined by the USDA saw fewer than half of farms reporting net gains. Additionally, 2017 was the first time in Vermont Housing and Conservation Board's Farm and Forest Viability Program's 15-year history in which participating farmers across farm types saw a decrease in both gross and net income.

As a result of these historical and emergent market challenges facing farm and food producers of all types, Network members have taken to developing a suite of initiatives and tools to address industry-specific needs as well as more universal strategies for effective business management.

Industry Specific Value Chain Development

Over the past three years, members of the Production & Processing Working Group and Farm Viability Indicators Task Force prioritized strengthening Vermont's grass-fed livestock sector, with a focus on grass-fed beef, in part because beef production has the potential to utilize the larger land bases of transitioning or diversifying dairies. Members issued the report **Grass-Fed Beef Value Chain Research** and interviewed producers that formed the basis for a **Grass-Based Beef Guide**, which includes guidance to producers on improving meat quality as well as budget templates and calculators designed to help producers better understand the variables and practices that influence profitability.



Vermont livestock producers enjoy a moment in the sun in October attending Dave Pratt's day-long workshop "Three Secrets for Increasing Profit". The workshop provided a preview to producers of the week-long *Ranching For Profit* school that will be held in February 2019 in Burlington. Photo: Troy Bishopp.

As a result of this process, stakeholders identified a need to offer an intensive learning environment focused on management and profitability for grass-fed producers serious about taking their business to the next level. The centerpiece of the accelerator is bringing the renowned **Ranching for Profit School** to Vermont in February 2019. This week-long intensive program aims to improve the health and productivity of a farm, the profitability of the farm business, and the quality of life of the farmer. Additional support and investment will be available to participating businesses upon completing the program, with the intent of creating a cohort of leaders who can serve as models of success in Vermont's emergent grass-fed beef industry.

Tools For All Types of Farm and Food Businesses

Beyond grass-fed beef, Network members are also working on important business management tool development, including a **distribution decision-making guide** and **cost analysis tool** and a soon-to-be-released video training on how to create effective **business advisory boards**. Business advisory boards are a way for food businesses of all types and scales, particularly those poised for growth but who may not be able to hire full-time management and marketing staff, to utilize outside expertise to get advice and analysis on key business management issues and decisions. Through the video guide, the Network is addressing a recognized gap in entrepreneurs' understanding of the role and value of advisory boards (and how they differ from having sole advisors or a board of directors), and the critical role they can play in helping a business navigate important issues such as growth, marketing, leadership development, and succession planning.

» Looking Ahead

The advancement and maturation of the work on grass-fed beef has led Network members to identify other targeted industry development projects and strategies that, in light of the negative impacts of a dairy industry in crisis, can address the need for developing financially viable production models and values-based supply chains. Some of these efforts include programs and resources dedicated to dairy, such as the newly created Vermont Chapter of the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program, and an upcoming revitalization of the annually conducted Organic Dairy Cost of Production study. Other work is exploring viable alternatives that can utilize the dairy land-base or provide options for diversification to dairy farmers. For example, the Network will be exploring opportunities and challenges for increasing viable grain production in Vermont. Grain production is appealing due to strong market demand for local bakery products and specialty flours. There is also an active and enthusiastic core group of grain producers and processors represented by the Northern Grain Growers Association, and a wealth of agronomic and production knowledge created and compiled by UVM Extension's Dr. Heather Darby.

3

Increasing Local Food Availability and Affordability in All Market Channels



Network Involvement

Working Groups: Aggregation and Distribution

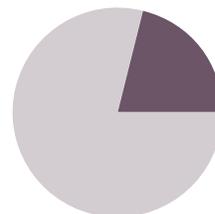
Cross-Cutting Teams: Food Access; Health; Food Cycle Coalition

Task Forces: Independent Grocers; Farm to Institution; Food Access Planning

The Farm to Plate Network has been hard at work to create new market opportunities for Vermont producers beyond the strong foundations of direct markets in a way that maintains the integrity, values, and transparency represented in direct food sales and balances a fair price for producers with accessibility for consumers.

The Network has placed strategic importance on improving opportunities and relationships among and between intermediated wholesale market players and increasing sales to intermediated wholesale markets (referred to herein as “intermediated markets”). Intermediated markets represent restaurants, grocers, schools, institutions, and distributors who explicitly support local producers and value place based relations but are still subject to price pressures and the logistical complexities of wholesaling in general. Making food more available and affordable also involves addressing systemic issues around food security, and to that end the Network has been looking strategically at how towns and communities can remove barriers and create infrastructure to increase food access.

Engaging with intermediated market players and providing them with technical assistance and support services is important because, as revealed in the Network’s **Food Procurement in Higher Education** report and the work of the Network’s Independent Grocers Task Force, many institutional and retail buyers are reliant on outside facilitators to assist them in local purchasing or creating local purchasing practices and policies. This work is known as values-based supply chain facilitation, or value-chain facilitation for short, and is an important strategic approach to building alliances and business-to-business relationships between farms, distributors, and buyers such as institutions and grocers that leads to greater financial returns for all and advances social and environmental values.



\$198m

of \$929 million of local products sold to intermediated markets in the Northeast were made by Vermont producers.

Source: USDA NASS 2015 Local Food Marketing Practices Survey.

Value Chain Approach Working With Retailers and Institutions



Staff at Keeler Bay Variety overhaul their meat department to increase sales of local meat and improve profitability.

The **Independent Grocers Task Force** has applied this value-chain approach by engaging in both broad statewide in-store retail training, and focused substate regional efforts to increase local sales at independent grocers in the Northeast Kingdom and Windham County in partnership with Green Mountain Farm to School and Food Connects. In total, 37 stores have received education and technical assistance, and 11 stores have received more in-depth in-store training, including VISTA in Newport, Steeple Market in Fairfax, Keeler Bay Variety in South Hero, Kingdom Market in Island Pond, and River Valley Market in Wilmington. Overall, the work with retailers has led to increased purchasing of local food and increased profitability for participating independent grocers, helping to increase availability of local food at stores accessible to more consumers and enhance the economic viability of Vermont's rural economy.

"Farm to Plate is a key figurehead for convening influential stakeholders that has helped make Vermont First a compelling and effective program. Farm to Plate has created the space for organizations and individuals to build trusting relationships in order to collaboratively tackle challenging, enduring issues. With our Vermont First Advisory Board we are able to dive deeper into supply chain topics from milk to beef due to the shared vision and shared food system language created by Farm to Plate."

Annie Rowell, Sodexo, Vermont First

Similar to the value-chain approach with retailers, with institutional markets Vermont Farm to Plate has had a significant impact on **Sodexo's Vermont First Program**, aligning values and influencing sourcing decisions that has led to changes in local meat purchasing and utilization of meat processing equipment invested in by the state. Farm to Plate is now engaged with Vermont First on examining how more Vermont produced dairy can get to their Vermont college accounts.

Universal Food Access Requires More than Value-Chain Engagement



Accepting EBT and Crop Cash at farmer's markets increases food access while also supporting local farmers. There are many potential "win-win" solutions, and many different community members have a role to play in implementing those solutions. Photo: NOFA-VT.

Because of the many additional barriers that Vermonters often face, strengthening the values-based supply chain is necessary but not sufficient to ensuring universal food access. The **Food Access Planning Task Force** has spent the past year exploring these barriers, and is creating a resource to help town and regional planners include food access as part of their local planning. Some of the strategies are aimed at strengthening direct food assistance for the most vulnerable, such as improving food recovery for food shelves or increasing community support for congregant meals. Other strategies, from making zoning changes to facilitate new food retail locations, to increasing transportation options, are aimed at strengthening the local food economy for businesses as well as consumers.

» Looking Ahead

In the years ahead, the Network will be devoted to figuring out how supply chain partners in our food system can work in concert to better serve existing and emerging intermediated markets. A significant factor in increasing sales in these markets is distribution and value chain facilitation.

In the next year we will be researching in-state and regional wholesale market opportunities and developing tools and resources to help Vermont farm and food businesses gain greater access to more markets, and Vermont consumers to gain greater access to local food. Selling into intermediated markets in Vermont can also be a good stepping stone for future sales to similar markets out of state.

4

Increasing Consumer Engagement and Demand for Local Food



Network Involvement

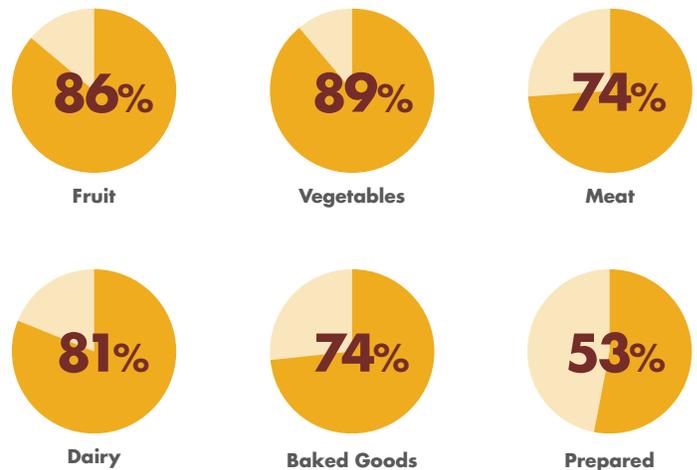
Working Groups: Consumer Education and Marketing

Task Forces: Agritourism; Communications and Marketing Community of Practice; Rooted in Vermont

The Farm to Plate Network has continued to focus on strategies to improve consumer awareness of Vermonters at all income levels in finding, purchasing and using local foods.

Efforts include increasing local and regional food marketing, enhancing consumer education and awareness, and expanding agritourism opportunities throughout the state. These efforts, spearheaded by the Consumer Education and Marketing Working Group, as well as private businesses, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies, have concentrated on expanding and coordinating marketing capacity and consumer engagement by reaching beyond typical audiences and engaging all types of Vermont consumers.

Which foods are you willing to pay more for, when locally produced?



While the perception exists in the public and amongst food retailers that price is an impediment to greater local food purchasing, data from the Vermonter Poll challenges this assumption by showing a strong willingness to pay more for many locally produced foods. The results from the Vermonter Poll point to an opportunity to increase purchasing by improving consumer education and awareness about local food availability and brands within specific food categories. Source: 2018 Vermonter Poll.

Streamlining Messaging



The Rooted in Vermont grassroots marketing campaign, which included outreach at many community events this past year, encourages all Vermonters to celebrate their experiences with local food.

As the Network strives to continuously increase demand and consumption of local food among Vermonters, it is important for a wider variety of Vermonters to see local food as part of their lives. The Network's local food marketing campaign, **Rooted in Vermont**, is working to reach more Vermonters by shifting the narrative around local food on social media and in Vermont communities, and celebrating all the ways in which Vermonters relate and interact with local foods.

Launched in late-2016, Rooted in Vermont has built an audience of Vermont consumers that are not traditionally included in the local food movement by creating and promoting content that specifically connects tradition, pride, community, trust, and equity to local food. This past year, the campaign transitioned into the next phase of introducing more content that encourages participation in local food activities, such as Vermont Open Farm Week or Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's Let's Go Fishing initiative. Uniquely, Rooted in Vermont also encourages partners to freely use the campaign messaging by integrating it into any of their marketing efforts aimed at promoting local food.

Direct-to-Consumer Engagement

The Network's initiatives to streamline messaging has served to complement other efforts undertaken by the Consumer Education and Marketing Working Group and its task forces to expand direct-to-consumer engagement throughout the state.

"Farm based experiences are the key to connecting the consumer back to where their food comes from. We need to continue to foster these experiences to grow appreciation for local farm and food. Offering these experiences strengthen community bonds."

Jennifer Kennett,
Owner and Operator, Tail Feather Farm, Middlebury, VT

In 2018, the Agritourism Task Force celebrated year four of Vermont **Open Farm Week**, which helps to facilitate the opening up and marketing of Vermont farms to the public in an effort to connect more people (in and out of state) with growers and producers of local food. The Task Force also launched a series of on-farm **agritourism workshops** touching on the topics of safety, liability, and marketing aimed at helping farmers leverage their existing assets to provide additional income and connect more consumers with their products.



Over 40 farms throughout Vermont participated in the 2018 Open Farm Week.

>> Looking Ahead

With initiatives such as Vermont Open Farm Week and Rooted in Vermont continuing to make progress, the Network has begun looking ahead to identify existing gaps in reaching consumers and how to best aid businesses, organizations and agencies in breaking through the noise of increased competition locally, regionally, and nationally to tell their own stories and to educate the consumer. The goal is to leverage initiatives, such as the **Marketing Community of Practice** and educational and agritourism efforts throughout the state that introduce consumers to local food, to better equip Network members with the tools needed to effectively tell their stories and connect Vermonters with local foods.

The Network also recognizes the need to continue to build consumer understanding of the systemic challenges facing the food system in Vermont in addition to raising awareness about Vermont food brands and availability. As more Vermonters begin to understand the true cost of local food, it can serve as a foundation for public support in collectively solving environmental challenges, meeting workforce needs, and many other Farm to Plate priorities.

5

Protecting and Expanding Affordable and Environmentally Sustainable Farmland in Agricultural Production



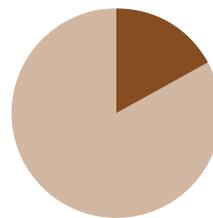
Network Involvement

Working Groups: Farmland Access & Stewardship

Cross-Cutting Teams: Energy; Financing; Food Cycle Coalition

Task Forces: Farmland Access; Agritourism

The Farm to Plate Network has always viewed farmland access and environmental stewardship as inseparable efforts. Farmland will not remain productive farmland into the future without environmental sustainability. At the same time, keeping farmland in agricultural production is the most effective way to preserve it from unsustainable development. A wide range of stakeholders and expertise must be involved in this work, from farmers to land use planners, farm business assistance providers to environmental experts. The Network, through several different groups, provides a venue for these players to collaboratively find “win-win” opportunities that help both individual farmers, the environment, and the climate.



17%

of Vermont farmland has been conserved

Source: Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and Vermont Land Trust.

Helping Farmers Find Success

The Farmland Access Task Force serves as a home for the well-networked service providers focused on farmland access in Vermont. Member organizations work directly with landowners and retiring farmers searching for the next generation of farmers, and work directly with farm seekers to improve their ability to access land and chances for success once on the land. Collectively, the Task Force manages **Vermont Land Link**, and is continuously working on improvements to the site infrastructure and outreach in order to reach a critical mass of farmland sellers and seekers. The Task Force also provides an important opportunity for on-the-ground practitioners to share upcoming initiatives and lessons learned, and to identify and address gaps. For example, members of the Task Force will be exploring potential support for farmers

that do not qualify for the Farm Viability Program, yet still need help planning for retirement and transition.

Systems Change Can Remove Existing Barriers

The individual assistance provided by members of the Farmland Access Task Force is essential to helping farmers and prospective farmers surmount current barriers to farmland access. An equally necessary process, though slower, is that of creating policies and programs that enable future farmers to access land regardless of whether they receive individual assistance.



Farm stores, like the one pictured at Green Mountain Girls Farm in Northfield, are an example of an on-farm accessory business protected by Act 143.

Since the beginning of Farm to Plate, land use planning and regulation has been a key topic within the Farmland Access and Stewardship Working Group. In 2017, the Working Group and the Agritourism Task Force explored the chilling effect of inconsistent and unclear local ordinances on accessory on-farm businesses. This past winter, Network members and additional key stakeholders helped craft the bill that in June passed the Vermont Legislature as **Act 143: An act relating to municipal land use regulation of accessory on-farm businesses and to hemp cultivation**. The bill creates consistency and clarity across the entire state by requiring that no municipal land use bylaw have the effect of prohibiting an accessory on-farm business at the same location as a farm regulated under the Required Agricultural Practices (RAP rules).

Ideas for removing barriers and establishing systems that facilitate farmland access are arising throughout the Network. For several years, the Farmland Access and Stewardship Working Group and the Energy Cross-Cutting Team have engaged in joint conversations on the role of solar siting on farmland and how to balance the financial benefits of renewable energy development that enable farmland access with the need to adequately preserve the land for agricultural production. The two groups will continue exploring best practices, creating resources, and identifying funding sources and incentives.

Moving from Reactive to Proactive in Stewardship

The Network takes a similar approach when it comes to farmland access' companion goal of environmental stewardship. Various Network groups, including the Farmland Access and Stewardship Working Group and the Food Cycle Coalition, serve as hubs for practitioners to share best practices and emerging news. Moreover, the Network is engaged in strategic discussions on how to create a compensation system that incentivizes proactive change and environmental benefits, rather than simply reducing

environmental harms. In 2018, these two groups provided input on the potential of carbon sequestration on farmland to representatives of the Vermont Climate Commission and explored related programs from other states. In 2019, a new Task Force will begin developing an actionable plan for instituting payment for ecosystem services.

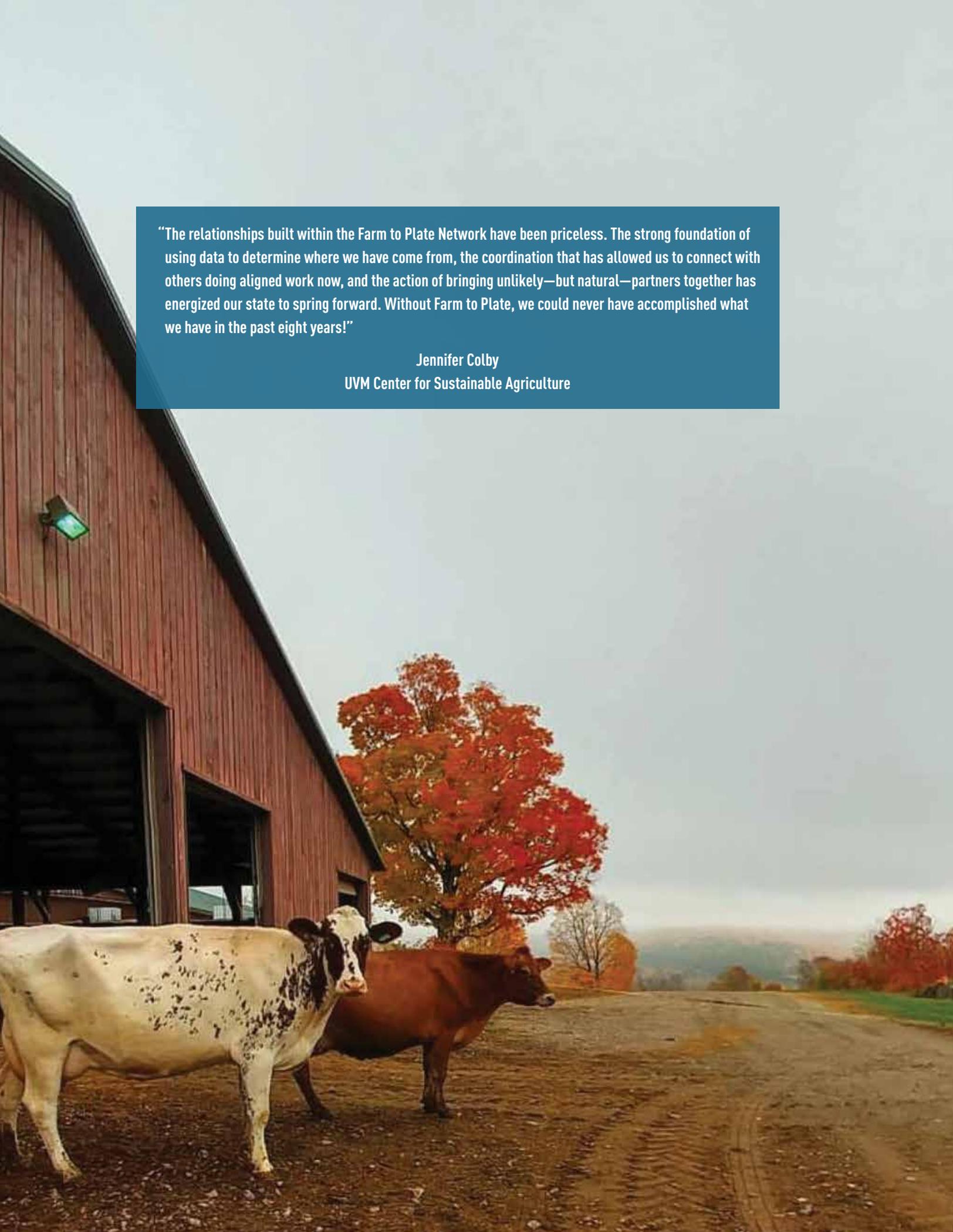
» Looking Ahead

The Network will continue to utilize its wide range of expertise to address complex issues (e.g., renewable energy production on ag-land and payment for ecosystem services) and develop strategies that improve the ability of farmers to access land, protect farmland for future generations, and leverage agricultural production for environmental services. Concurrently, the Network is focused on solidifying and expanding already effective services and programs. Members of the Farmland Access Task Force and the Financing Cross-Cutting Team are planning a farmland succession convening in early 2019 to galvanize additional private and public capital provider support for existing programs while identifying potential new partnerships and financing and funding instruments.

The Network will also devote effort to implementing strategies and exploring areas of need identified in the paper **A 2018 Exploration of the Future of Vermont Agriculture**. The paper is the product of a small group of key agricultural stakeholders led by UVM Extension and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board grappling with how to respond to ongoing negative trends in Vermont agriculture. It documents the risks to Vermont's agricultural assets, the history of the response, and key opportunities to pursue further, concluding that while existing activities are highly valuable and impactful, they are not sufficient to fully address anticipated negative trends. New approaches must be identified, evaluated, and implemented with greater urgency, and the Farm to Plate Network will be an important vehicle for doing so over the coming year.

"This is a conversation about a creeping crisis that could threaten the foundation of our agricultural resource base in the state if we don't pay attention now."

Chuck Ross, UVM Extension

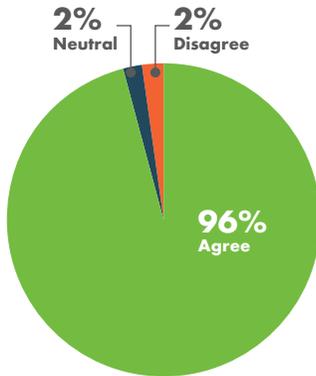
A photograph of a farm scene. On the left, a large wooden barn with vertical siding and a green light fixture is visible. In the foreground, two cows stand on a dirt path: one is white with black spots, and the other is solid brown. In the background, a large tree with vibrant red and orange autumn leaves stands prominently. The sky is overcast and grey.

“The relationships built within the Farm to Plate Network have been priceless. The strong foundation of using data to determine where we have come from, the coordination that has allowed us to connect with others doing aligned work now, and the action of bringing unlikely—but natural—partners together has energized our state to spring forward. Without Farm to Plate, we could never have accomplished what we have in the past eight years!”

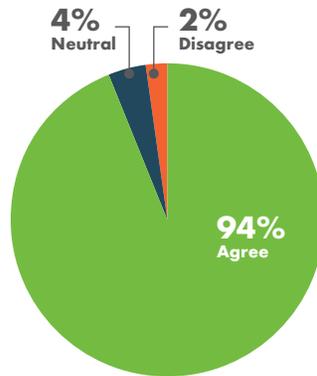
Jennifer Colby
UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture

The Value of the Network

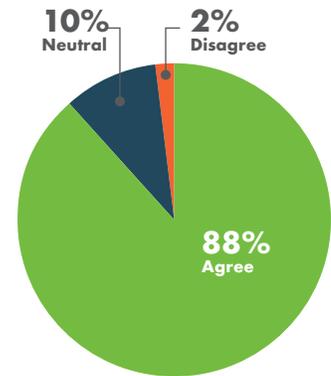
The Farm to Plate Network is made up of 350+ food system businesses, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, funders, and government agencies. In an annual survey of Network members and Gathering attendees, respondents were asked to identify which aspects of the Network they found most valuable.



The Network is helping my organization build stronger relationships with other organizations in the Network and/or the broader food system in Vermont.

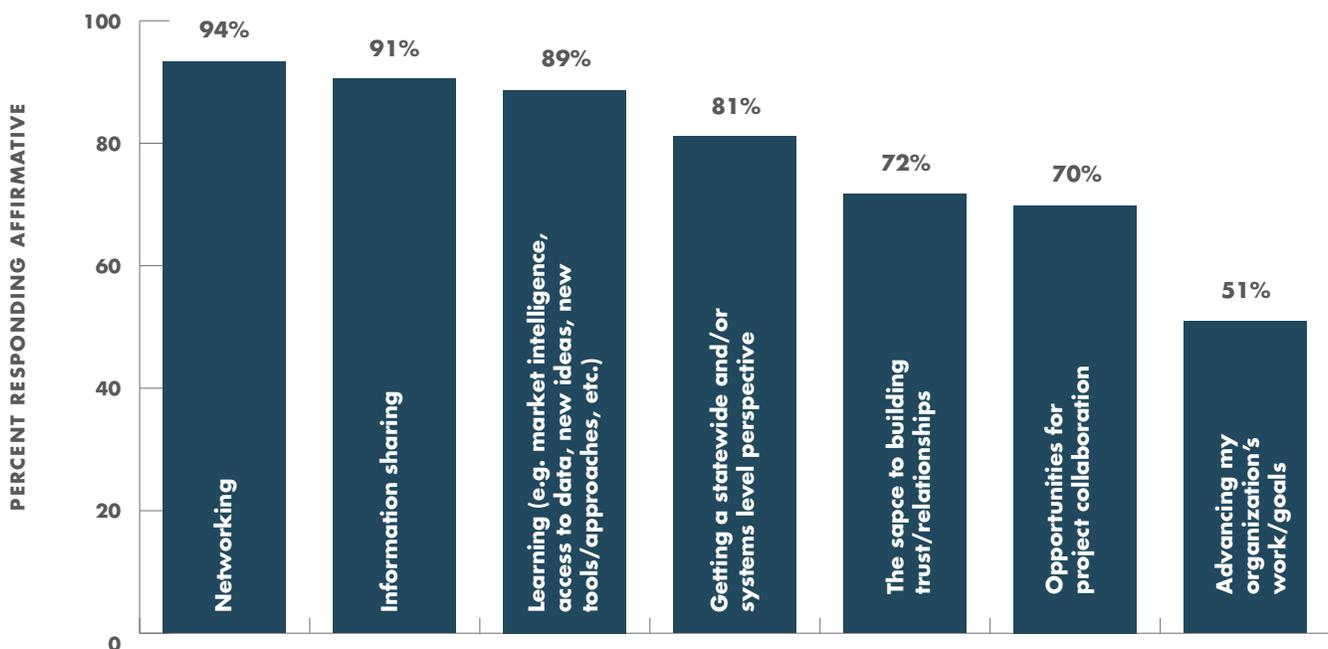


The Network is helping my organization build new relationships with other organizations in the Network and/or broader food system in Vermont.



The Network is helping my organization reach its own goals.

Percent of Respondents who Find Value in Each of these Network Services



Farm to Plate Network Leadership

Shared leadership provides overall network governance and guidance for the Farm to Plate Network. Network chairs and the Steering Committee are responsible for identifying gaps in strategies, developing processes for learning, helping organize the annual Farm to Plate Network Gathering, and shaping the evolution of the Network over time.

● **Aggregation and Distribution Working Group:**

Richard Berkfield*
Food Connects
Julia Scheier*
Salvation Farms

● **Consumer Education & Marketing Working Group:**

Jean Hamilton*
Consultant
Becka Warren*
Vital Communities

● **Education and Workforce Development Working Group:**

Kristyn Achilich*
St. Michael's College
John Mandeville*
Lamoille Economic
Development Corporation

● **Farmland Access and Stewardship Working Group:**

Graham Unangst-Rufenacht*
Rural Vermont

● **Production and Processing Working Group:**

Regina Beidler*
Organic Valley
Jennifer Colby*
UVM Center for
Sustainable Agriculture

● **Energy Cross-Cutting Team:**

No chair

● **Financing Cross-Cutting Team:**

Eric DeLuca
Leverage Point Consulting

● **Food Access Cross-Cutting Team**

Erin Buckwalter*
NOFA-VT
Faye Mack*
Hunger Free Vermont

● **Food Cycle Coalition Cross-Cutting Team:**

Natasha Duarte
Composting Association
of Vermont

● **Health Cross-Cutting Team:**

Suzanne Kelley
Vermont Department of Health
Jane Kolodinsky
UVM Center for Rural Studies

● **Research Cross-Cutting Team:**

Molly Anderson
Middlebury College
Alison Nihart
UVM Extension

● **Agritourism Task Force:**

Lisa Chase
UVM Extension
Vera Simon-Nobes
Shelburne Farms

● **Business Viability Indicators Task Force:**

Mark Cannella
UVM Extension

● **Communications and Marketing Community of Practice:**

Vicky Tebbetts
VT Marketing and Communications

● **Career Pathways & Image Task Force:**

Liz Kenton
UVM Extension

● **Workforce Development, Education, & Business Partnership Task Force:**

Mary Niebling
Capstone Community Action

Liz Ruffa
Northshire Grows

John Mandeville
Lamoille Economic
Development Corporation*

● **Farmland Access Task Force:**

Mike Ghia
Land for Good

● **Farm to Institution Task Force:**

Abbey Willard*
Vermont Agency of Agriculture,
Food & Markets
Erin Buckwalter*
NOFA-VT

● **Food Access Planning Task Force:**

Faye Mack*
Hunger Free Vermont

● **Independent Grocers Task Force:**

Annie Harlow
Addison County
Relocalization Network

● **Rooted in Vermont Task Force:**

Shane Rogers
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

● **Slow Money Vermont Task Force:**

Janice Shade
Slow Money Vermont

* Denotes a Chair who is also a member of the Steering Committee.

Additional Steering Committee Members:

Megan Camp
Shelburne Farms

Betsy Rosenbluth
Vermont FEED, *representing the Vermont Farm to School Network*

Gaye Symington
High Meadows Fund, *representing the Vermont Food Funders Network*

Anson Tebbetts
Secretary of Agriculture,
Food & Markets

Ted Brady
Deputy Secretary of Commerce
& Community Development

Network at a Glance



Working Groups

Working Groups (WG) are at the core of the Farm to Plate Network, one for each major “systems lever”. Each WG takes responsibility for a set of goals, strategies, and indicators from the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan to further develop, implement, and monitor annually.

Cross-Cutting Teams

Cross-Cutting Teams (CCT) gather a few times a year to assess key issues that cut across the entire food system supply chain. CCTs can serve as a “community of practice” to share best practices and information across the Network, organize events, or conduct research to inform future network action.

Task Forces

Task Forces (TF) are formed by WGs or CCTs in order to implement high impact projects that address key objectives and strategies identified in the Strategic Plan. TFs are created and disbanded based on need.

The Gathering November 1-2, 2018

The 8th Annual Farm to Plate Network Gathering brought over 240 Food System thinkers together to problem solve and consider characteristics of resiliency. Keynote speaker Laura Lengnick, of Cultivating Resiliency, presented frameworks for addressing resilience and facilitated conversations over the two-day event that resulted in “big idea” next steps for the Network.



“I came home consumed with the question, ‘how can I use my position at work and in my community to prepare us for the immediate crises in land use, climate disaster, and disruption, no more little steps, let’s go big.’”
—Farm to Plate Network Gathering Attendee



“The Gathering is a chance to talk to people outside of my immediate sphere and get a better idea of everything that is happening across the state of Vermont.”

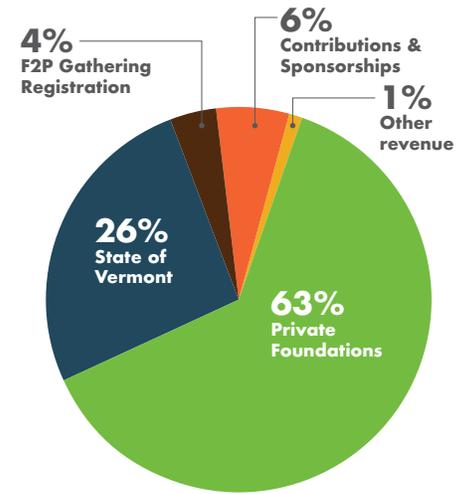
—Farm to Plate Network Gathering Attendee



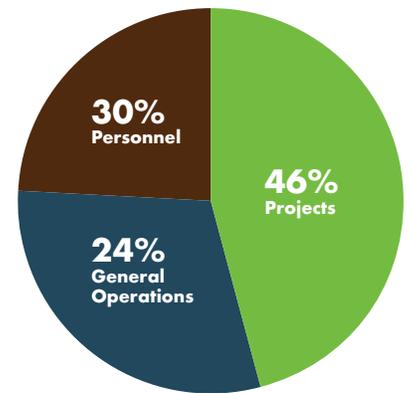
Financials

Revenue	
Private Foundations	\$432,996
State of Vermont	\$177,536
F2P Gathering Registration	\$25,875
Contributions & Sponsorships	\$40,958
Other Revenue	\$5,265
Total Revenue	\$682,630
Expenses	
F2P General Operations	\$156,194
F2P Personnel	\$197,233
F2P Projects	
Farm to Plate Website / Food Atlas	\$6,098
Farm to Plate Network Meetings / Gathering	\$30,751
Farm to Plate Leadership Stipends	\$66,071
Rooted in Vermont Consumer Campaign	\$112,843
Independent Grocers Project	\$72,022
Slow Money VT	\$2,861
F2P support for other New England states	\$8,135
F2P Network Grants	\$2,501
F2P Projects Total	\$301,282
Total Expenses	\$654,708

Farm to Plate Investment Program Revenue



Farm to Plate Investment Program Expenses



*In total, VSJF expended \$6,098 in the F2P Website program last fiscal year. An additional \$11,755 was expended during the fiscal year on website development. These website development expenditures were capitalized & will be depreciated over the next 3 fiscal years.

Funding Partners

VSJF and the Farm to Plate Network Steering Committee are extremely grateful to our funding partners who help to fund the work of the Farm to Plate community and are actively engaged in various projects within the Network. Their ongoing support allows us to find creative solutions to complex problems, and grow a stronger, healthier, more prosperous food system in Vermont and the region.

- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
- Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development
- John Merck Fund
- Henry P. Kendall Foundation
- Vermont Community Foundation
- Sandy River Charitable Trust
- High Meadows Fund
- Claneil Foundation
- Angell Foundation
- Jane’s Trust

About the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund serves as the administrator and backbone organization to the Farm to Plate Network and manages the analysis and goal tracking of the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan implementation.

VSJF provides the following services to the Farm to Plate Network:

- Guides **VISION** and provides **STRATEGIC GUIDANCE** and **COORDINATION** to Network groups.
- **SUPPORTS ALIGNED ACTIVITIES** and **FACILITATES DIALOGUE** across the Network on key issues to advance new ideas, fix bottlenecks, reduce unnecessary duplication of efforts, and open new markets for Vermont products in a coordinated fashion.
- Implements **SHARED MEASUREMENT PRACTICES** using the Results Based Accountability framework—a planning and evaluation framework used in Vermont by dozens of nonprofits, the legislature, and state government agencies—and tracks progress on the outcomes and goals of the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan.
- **MOBILIZES FUNDING** to support the work of Farm to Plate Network groups and strategy implementation.
- Manages **COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH** about Vermont’s food system to member organizations and the general public.
- Provides **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** and **LEADERSHIP TRAINING** opportunities for Network members.
- **BUILDS PUBLIC WILL** to support local agriculture and the food system as key drivers of sustainable economic development in Vermont.

Staff



Left to Right:

Shane Rogers, Rooted in Vermont Project Manager

Kelly Nottermann, Communications Manager

Jake Claro, Farm to Plate Director

Sarah Danly, Farm to Plate Network Manager

Lydia Pitkin, Farm to Plate Program Coordinator

Ellen Kahler, Executive Director

“VSJF does a fantastic job of providing backbone support—from logistics to strategic thinking and direction. Farm to Plate would not be as productive and effective without you all.”

Farm to Plate Network Survey Respondent

Photography: Cover, clockwise from top left: Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAF), VAAF, VAAF, King Arthur Flour, Hunger Free Vermont, Lake Champlain Chocolates, Erica Houskeeper Communications; Page 4, Red Hen; Page 6, North Harwick Dairy; Page 10, NOFA-VT; Page 12, Cedar Circle Farm; Page 14, VAAF.

Design: Pluck, pluckvermont.com



VERMONT FARM TO PLATE

VTFARMTOPLATE.COM

@VTFARM2PLATE

administered by

VERMONT SUSTAINABLE JOBS FUND

3 Pitkin Ct #301E

Montpelier, VT 05602

802-828-1260