



Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

VERMONT FARM & FOREST VIABILITY PROGRAM



2018 Annual Report

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program benefits rural communities and businesses across Vermont. It supports entrepreneurs in early stages of business as well as mature operations, all the way through to succession. The proportion of businesses enrolling in the program for help planning a transfer to new ownership rapidly increased in the past year, and we now work not only with farm and forestry businesses on succession but forest landowners as well, in an effort to reduce the likelihood of parcelization of Vermont’s forest blocks.

In 2018 the Viability Program’s business assistance to 167 working lands businesses resulted in increased sales, profits, and employment in our rural communities. While there are significant market and regulatory challenges facing dairy farms, diversified agricultural businesses, logging operations and sawmills, there are many creative working lands entrepreneurs finding ways to meet these challenges, create strong brands, diversify their operations, and succeed.

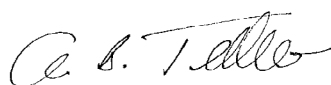
VHCB supports farm and forestland succession through land conservation and water quality investments as well, providing multiple tools for landowners and coordinating closely with State Agencies to determine where best to deploy these investments. With funding from the State of Vermont Capital Construction and Bonding Act, in FY18 and through this December we awarded \$881,099 in grants to support water quality improvements on 29 farms that leveraged over \$7.8M (nearly a 9:1 ratio). We also made over \$492,302 in Dairy Improvement Grants to 17 farms, which leveraged an additional \$2.2M (more than 4:1).

This report also provides the results of the new Rural Economic Development Initiative. This program provides grant writing assistance and utilized \$75,000 to support 10 successful applications securing a total of \$1.78M for communities from Pownal to Albany.

Thank you for your support.



Gustave Seelig, Executive Director
Vermont Housing &
Conservation Board



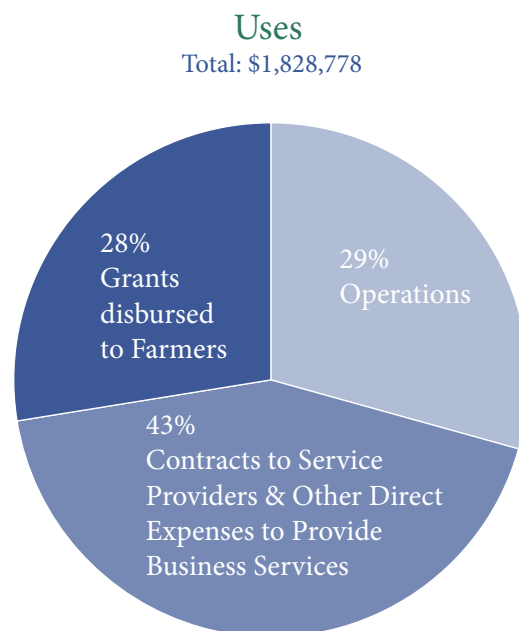
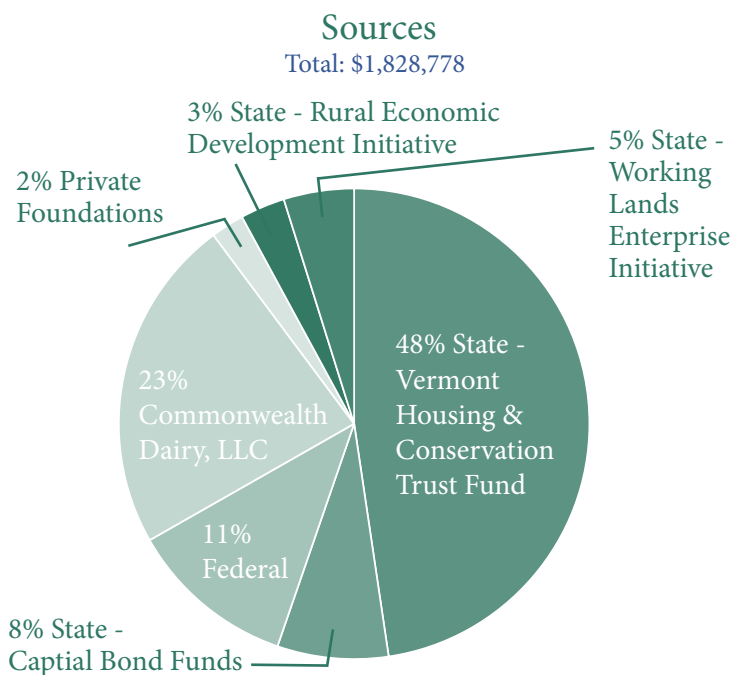
Secretary Anson Tebbetts
Vermont Agency of Agriculture,
Food & Markets



Commissioner Michael Snyder
Vermont Department of Forests,
Parks & Recreation

Our Budget

In FY18, the Viability Program expended just over \$1.8 million, more than a third coming from federal and private funding sources.





Viability Program service providers & staff, left to right: Maggie Donin, Jess Phelps, Liz Gleason, Mike Ghia, Jaime Silverstein, Daniel Keeney, Ela Chapin, Jen Miller, Lisa McCrory, Ian Hartman, Chris Lindgren, Kevin Channell, Katie Michels, Tony Kitsos, Nikki Lennart and Annalise Carington.

Our Mission

To enhance the economic viability of Vermont's farm, food, and forest products enterprises.

Services Provided in 2018

167 Clients Served

144 farms received business or transfer planning services

5 food hubs received strategic planning assistance

12 forest products businesses received technical assistance

6 forestland-owning families received one-on-one succession planning assistance

46 Grants Awarded

17 farms received Dairy Improvement Grants

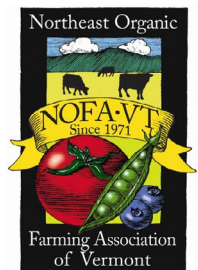
29 farms received Water Quality Grants

7 Workshops

68 loggers attended 3 business management workshops

43 family forestland owners and consulting foresters attended 4 succession planning workshops

Our Network of Service Providers





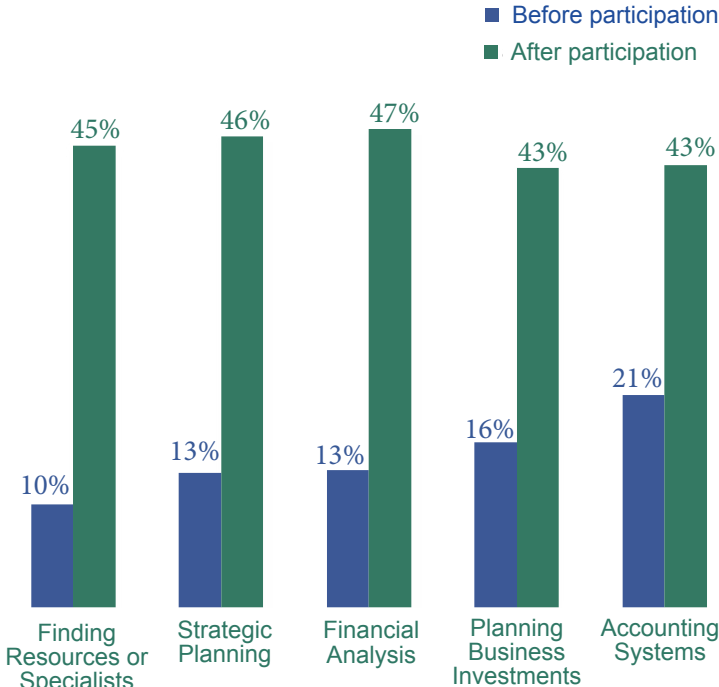
Justin Sauerwein owns Almanack Farm in Chelsea, where he raises grass-fed beef on a property that is in the process of being conserved with VHCB funding. Through the Viability Program, Justin is working with Kevin Channell, an adviser from the Intervale Center. Having spent most his life around cattle grazing, Justin is comfortable on the production side of his business, but he notes “Kevin brings another set of eyes, and more expertise, on the financial side. He’s able to double-check my numbers and ideas, plus it’s nice to have help navigating the conservation process, lending, financing, and long-term business planning.”

In 2018, 144 farms received business advising services, including 85 new enrollees listed on the centerfold map. This cohort of farms includes conventional and organic dairy, maple, produce and livestock operations as well as value-added producers. Farmers report improved satisfaction with work-life balance after program participation as well as advancement in a variety of business skills. Our business

advising often complements VHCB’s farmland conservation investments to assist farmers buying land for the first time, as well as farmers looking at options for retirement and transitioning operations to new ownership.

2018 was a difficult year for farmers in our state and the challenges will continue in 2019. Conventional milk prices remain low, dairies planning to transition to organic need to wait several years, and vegetable and diversified farmers continue to report a saturation in direct markets and downward market pressure on prices. In this economic climate, the Viability Program focuses on sound financial planning, long-term business strategy, accessing new markets and transitioning to different products, and succession planning to assist exiting farmers and their successors to transfer the farm in a way that sets up the new generation for as much success as possible.

Percent of farmers who report high skills in:



From 2017 to 2018 Viability Program Participants:

↑ Gross sales by 21%

↑ Profits by \$32,500 ave. per business

Full Belly Farm Monkton

“We had the farming experience, but not the business experience. The Viability Program helped us get our feet underneath us and move forward with confidence in our plans.”

— Stephen & Sarah Park

Sarah and Stephen Park own Full Belly Farm in Monkton, previously known as Norris Berry Farm. To retire from farming and ensure it stayed in agriculture, Norma Norris sold the farm to the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) in 2017. VLT conserved the farm with VHCB funds and other sources, and selected the Parks to purchase the property through their Farmland Access Program. Viability Program business adviser Sam Smith from the Intervale Center worked closely with the Parks as they prepared to move on to the property. Sarah explains: “It’s easy to feel overwhelmed entering an established business. There are so many directions we could go.” Stephen adds that the Program “helped us make adjustments and be confident in our plans.” Sam also helped them identify a key bottleneck in the farm infrastructure — cold storage. With this in mind, the Parks applied to the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board and received \$5,869 in grant funds to purchase a walk-in cooler, a key piece of equipment they were glad to have as their first watermelon crop came in.



Vermont Food Hub Collaborative

The Viability Program provides strategic support and facilitation for the Vermont Food Hub Collaborative. This group includes the Center for an Agricultural Economy, Green Mountain Farm Direct, Intervale Food Hub, Mad River Food Hub, and Food Connects. The intention of this collaborative is to improve inter-food hub trade and logistics and better understand local and regional markets. As a result, collaborating food hubs expect to facilitate local producers selling more Vermont products in new and existing markets.



Babette's Table Located at Mad River Food Hub

Erika Lynch, owner of Babette's Table, makes French-inspired cured meats at the Mad River Food Hub. Utilizing production space at the food hub during the early years of her business has enabled Erika to focus on production, sales, and marketing, while planning ahead for the next stages of business. With Viability advisers from the Center for an Agricultural Economy, she has developed enterprise budgets for each line of products, a pricing strategy, and a business plan.



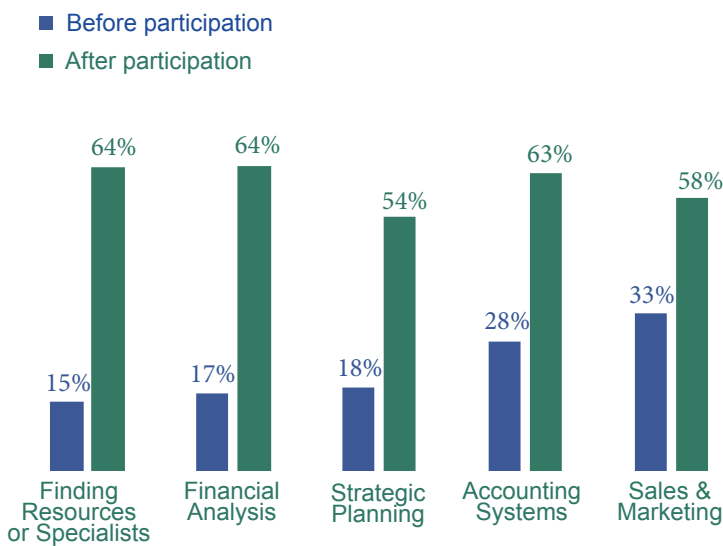
Forest Viability

Ian Martin watches over boiling sap. He and Eveline Martin own Northwoods Farm & Forestry in Newfane. They provide consulting forestry services and produce maple syrup and are enrolled in the Viability Program for assistance considering changes to their business. Chris Lindgren, an adviser from UVM Extension, provided the Martins with a number of financial tools. The business planning process, “has focused our thinking,” says Eveline. “Being able to break down our financials to plan for the future and look at past trends has been very helpful.”

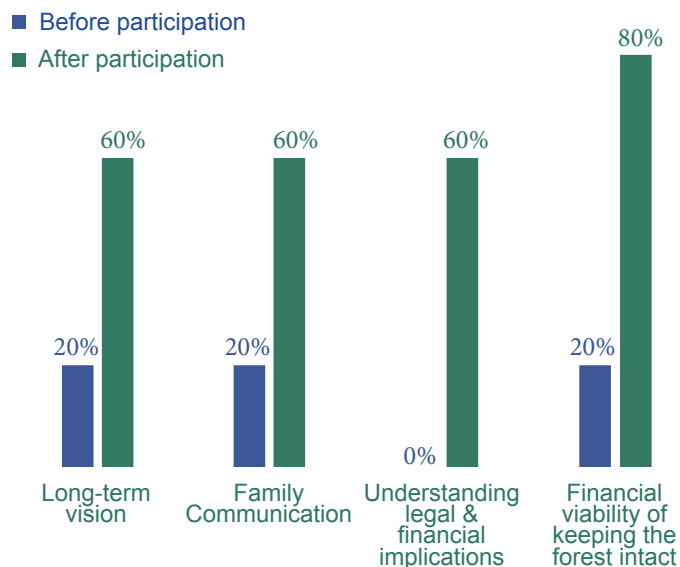
In 2018, twelve forest products businesses received business advising through the Viability Program, including loggers, foresters, a design/build business, and wood manufacturers. Additionally, 68 loggers attended three business skills workshops. Workshops and services were coordinated and provided by UVM Extension’s Forest Business Program.

Since 2013, the Viability Program has provided in-depth, one-on-one business advising to 51 businesses in Vermont’s forest products industry. These entrepreneurs report significant increases in satisfaction with their business management abilities and improvements in their business management skills. They also report increased income and employment levels after program participation.

Percent of business owners who report high skills in:



Percent of forest landowners who report high satisfaction in:



Forest fragmentation is both an ecological challenge and a threat to the state’s forest products industry. Nearly 80% of Vermont’s forestland is privately owned by families, and a major driver of fragmentation is the subdivision of large forested parcels that occurs when assets pass from one generation to the next.

A large parcel of forest can be a complicated asset to pass on to the next generation. Through our partnership with Vermont Woodlands Association (VWA), the Viability Program provides one-on-one, in-depth succession planning for families that own Vermont forestland, helping families take actionable steps to keep the land intact and in the family.



Towhead LLC Danville

“It’s so helpful to talk with someone about my business who isn’t trying to sell me something.”

—Isaac Pearl

Photo: Ben DeFlorio

Isaac Pearl owns Towhead LLC, a logging business based in Danville. To begin the harvest in the photo above, he built a 50-foot bridge and a significant amount of road before the job could start in earnest. Loggers face terrain, weather, and market challenges; a common characteristic of successful operators is a sophisticated understanding of their operating costs. Working with Viability adviser Chris Lindgren from UVM Extension, Isaac re-organized his business financials. From there, the two were able to identify exactly what activities generate the most income for Towhead, and Chris also helped Isaac build tools to use that information to make strategic decisions for the business. Isaac usually hires one extra person for the winter, but this year he needs more capacity and has hired on two employees. Like most logging business owners, Isaac is constantly weighing the costs and benefits of different equipment set-ups, and he is using some of the skills and tools acquired through working with the Viability Program to make some equipment decisions this winter.



Morse Family Forest Succession Planning

Deborah and Ronald Morse of Poultney own about 250 acres of woodlands in Chateaugay, part of a high priority forest block, according to the Vermont Conservation Design. The land brings their family together and is part of a legacy the couple wishes to pass on to their children. In 2016, Deborah and Ron attended a Vermont Woodlands Association (VWA) workshop on succession planning. Thinking back on how prepared her family was, Deborah admitted: “Succession wasn’t even in our vocabulary.

We really didn’t know where to start.” After getting a sense of the issues their family would face, Deborah and Ron reached out to the Viability Program to work in-depth with VWA’s forestland succession planning advisers, forester Mary Sisock and Audrey Winograd a family counselor with a background in law.

Mary and Audrey helped Deborah and Ron organize an initial weekend-long family meeting spent at a cabin on the property. At this meeting, parents and children discussed their goals and learned about the succession process. “Audrey got such honest feedback from the kids,” said Deborah. “They shared things they wouldn’t have otherwise said to mom, dad or even each other.” The family came away with a shared aspiration to keep their woodland intact as a single parcel, but Deborah realized “having future generations be able to share the tax burden and enjoy the property fairly remains a hurdle.”

In 2018, the Morse family worked with their Viability advisers to better understand the income requirements of managing the property and to develop a trust that will protect the integrity of their woods for at least the next two generations.

2018 Viability Program Participants

Farms & Value-added Producers

- * 1. Almanack Farm, Chelsea
- 2. Alpenglow Farm, Warren
- 3. Ananda Gardens, Montpelier
- 4. Andersonville Farm, Glover
- * 5. Bagley Farm, Granville
- * 6. Berry Creek Farm, Westfield
- 7. Besteyfield Farm, Hinesburg
- 8. Black Dirt Farm, Greensboro Bend
- 9. Brandview Farm, Brandon
- * 10. Brault's Market & Slaughterhouse, Troy
- * 11. Breezy Valley Farm, Belvidere Center
- 12. Buttercup Mountain Farm, Barre
- * 13. Butterworks Farm, Westfield
- 14. Consider Bardwell Farm, West Pawlet
- 15. Crawford Family Farm, Whiting
- 16. Crazy 8 Farm, Newport Center
- 17. Crooked Mile Cheese, Waterford
- 18. Crowley Cheese, Mount Holly
- 19. Dolcetti, Newport
- 20. Eastview Farm, East Hardwick
- 21. Farmer Brown Farm, Enosburg Falls
- 22. Fat Toad Farm, Brookfield
- 23. Fieldstone Farm, Northfield
- * 24. Full Belly Farm, Hinesburg
- 25. Godin Family Farm, Franklin
- 26. Golden Russet Farm, Shoreham
- 27. Grass Cattle Co., Charlotte
- * 28. Green Wind Farm, Enosburg Falls
- * 29. Harlow Farm, Westminster
- 30. Harris Family Farm, Bridport
- 31. Hill Top Farm, Shoreham
- 32. Hillcrest Farms, Randolph
- 33. Holyoke Farm, St. Albans
- * 34. Hosley Hill Farm, Danby
- * 35. Island Acres Farm, South Hero
- * 36. Kimball Brook Creamery, Ferrisburgh
- 37. Lanphear Farm, Hyde Park
- * 38. Larson Farm, Wells
- * 39. Last Resort Farm, Bristol
- 40. Ledgenear, West Glover
- 41. Lincoln Peak Vineyard, New Haven
- * 42. Littlewood Farm, Plainfield
- 43. Luna Bleu Farm, South Royalton
- * 44. Magnan Brothers Dairy, Fairfield
- * 45. Mead Farms, Newport Center
- * 46. Meeting Place Pastures, Cornwall
- 47. Miskell's Premium Organics, Charlotte

- * 48. Misty Meadows Farm, Brownington
- 49. Mountain Home Farm, Tunbridge
- 50. Murray Farm, Ryegate
- 51. Naked Acre Farm, Hyde Park
- 52. Nichols Fodder Farm, Charlotte
- 53. Old Road Farm, Bristol
- * 54. Orb Weaver Farm, New Haven
- 55. Otter Point Farm, West Haven
- 56. Owl's Head Farm, Richmond
- 57. Peaceful Harvest Mushrooms, Worcester
- * 58. Peterson's Quality Malt, Ferrisburgh
- 59. Pete's Stand, Bellows Falls
- 60. Pfister Farm, Landgrove
- * 61. Pigasus Meats, South Hero
- * 62. Pink Boot Farm, Wells
- 63. Pistil Production, Morristown
- 64. Rhapsody Natural Foods, Cabot
- 65. Rolling Bale Farm, Shoreham
- 66. Saltis Farm, Poultney
- * 67. Scholten Family Farm, Weybridge
- * 68. Scott Farm, Dummerston
- 69. Second Wind Farm, Woodstock
- 70. Shadow Creek Farm, Fairfax
- 71. Shelburne Orchards, Shelburne
- 72. Small Axe Farm, Barnet
- 73. Stickney Farm, Putney
- * 74. Strafford Organic Creamery, Strafford
- 75. Sweet Pickins Farm, Putney
- * 76. Sweet Rowen Farm, Glover
- 77. Tail Feather Farm, Rochester
- 78. Thornhill Farm, Greensboro Bend
- * 79. Trillium Hill Farm, Hinesburg
- * 80. Vermont Heritage Elk, Fairfax
- 81. Walker Farm, East Dummerston
- * 82. Wilcox Dairy, Manchester
- 83. Wild Water Farm, Hartford
- 84. Wildstone Farm, Pownal
- * 85. Yoder Farm, Danby

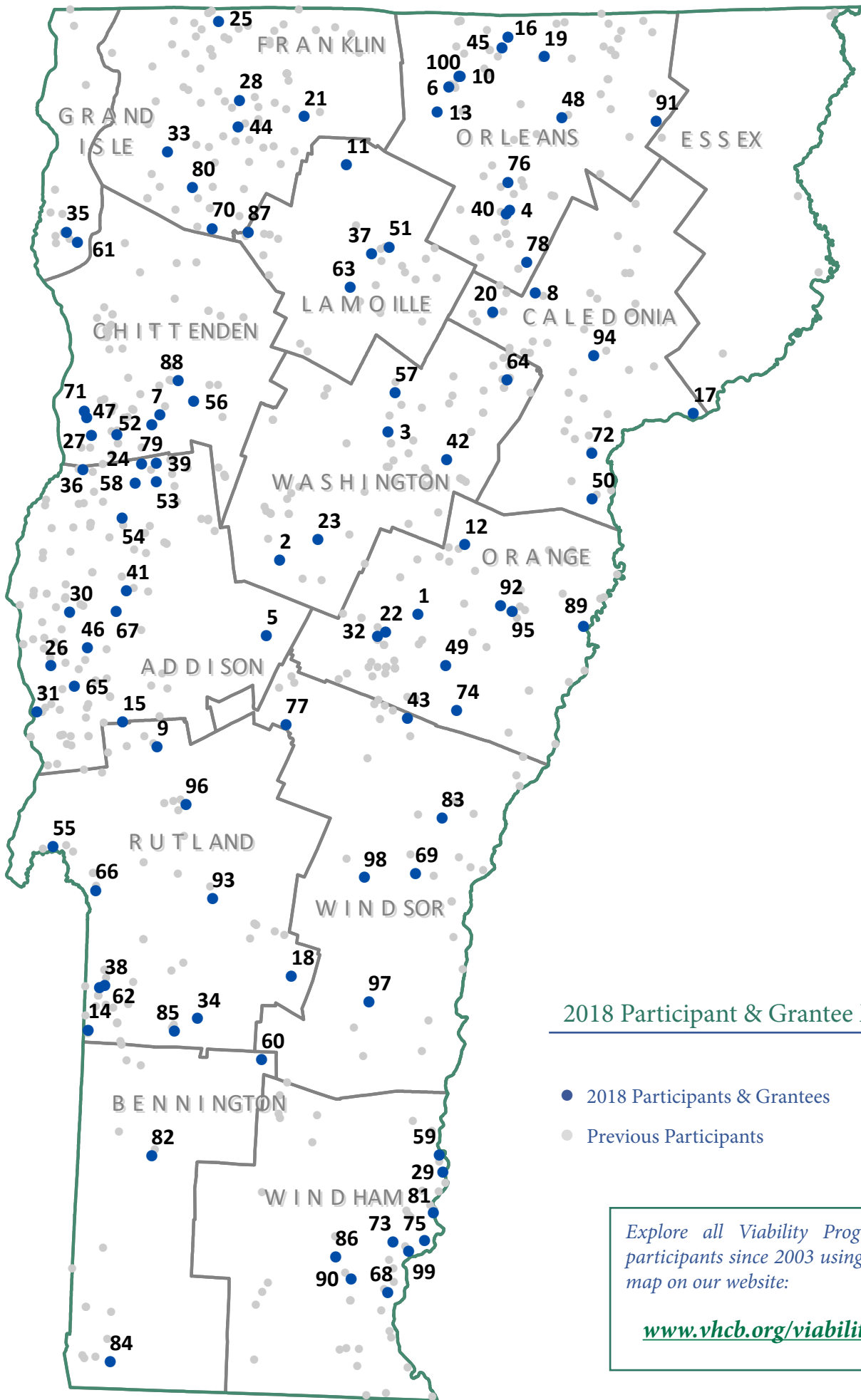
Forest Products Enterprises

- 86. Better Wheel Workshop, Newfane
- 87. Fairfax Woodworking Collective, Fairfax
 - Anders Furniture
 - Jamie Herman Studio Furniture
 - Towards Nightfall
 - Valor Woodworking
- 88. Green Mountain Grain and Barrel, Richmond
- 89. Keith Michelson Designer/Builder, Bradford
- 90. Northwoods Farm & Forestry, Newfane
- * 91. North Woods Stewardship Center, Charleston
- 92. Redstart, Corinth
- 93. Thurston Forestry, North Clarendon
- 94. Towhead, Danville

Forest Landowners

- 95. Bingaman Family, Corinth
- 96. Gagnon Family, Pittsford
- * 97. Lindberg Family, Cavendish
- 98. Morse Family, Chateaugay
- 99. Pick Family, Putney
- 100. Starr Family, Troy

* *Conserved*



2018 Participant & Grantee Map

- 2018 Participants & Grantees
- Previous Participants

Explore all Viability Program participants since 2003 using the map on our website:

www.vhcb.org/viability



Dairy Improvement Grants

Aaron & Chantale Nadeau own Top Notch Holsteins in Holland. For some time, they had gotten by with malfunctioning ventilation curtains in the freestall barn and a gutter chain given to constant breakdowns, but attending to finicky infrastructure was eating into the farm's productivity. The Nadeaus received a \$14,000 Dairy Improvement Grant to go toward replacements, and Aaron says "honestly, it's been a lifesaver."

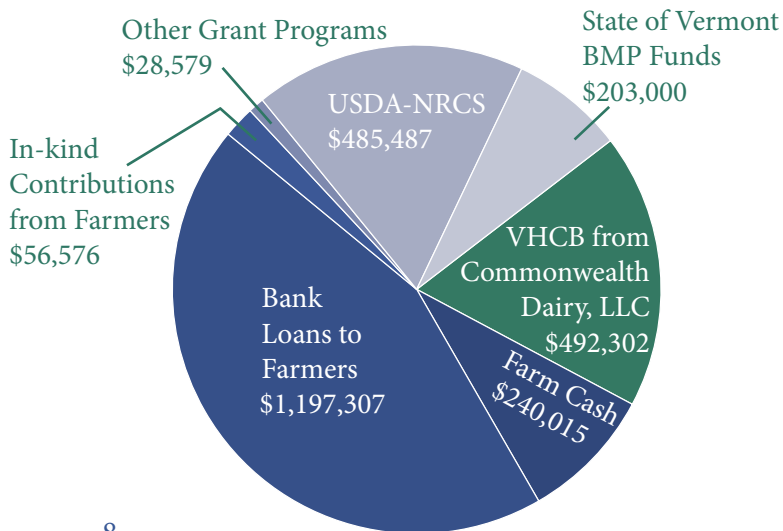
The Dairy Improvement Grant program has funded over \$1.6 million in grants to Vermont dairy farmers over the past seven years. The grants are available to members of the St. Albans Cooperative Creamery and Dairy Farmers of America who supply milk to Ehrmann Commonwealth Dairy, LLC, the funder of this grant program. Grants are awarded to improve farm viability and increase the quality and volume of milk produced in Vermont. The grants have enabled farmers to invest in infrastructure and equipment, resulting in numerous positive outcomes, including improvements in employee safety and welfare, labor efficiency, animal welfare, milk quality, and environmental stewardship. Grantees are located across the state, farm conventionally and organically, and include operations of all sizes.

For Grantees, Finished Projects Have Resulted in:

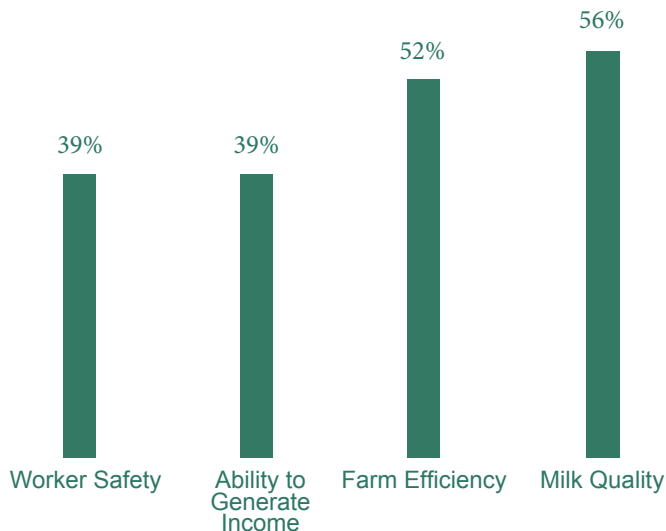
- 4% more milk shipped
- 2.9% more milk per cow
- 5.7% more acres in production

Total funding of listed projects

\$2,703,267 of VHCB & leveraged funds



Percent of grantees who, after project implementation, report increased satisfaction in:



Dairy Improvement Grantees

*17 farms awarded a total of \$492,302,
leveraging an additional \$2,210,965 in investments, more than 4:1.
(Jul. 1, 2017 - Dec. 31, 2018)*

Karie Atherton, Aires Hill Farm, Berkshire
\$40,000 to buy a cow activity and milk monitoring system

Crystal & Corey D'Avignon, Independence Farm, Orwell
\$16,580 for barnyard and heifer housing repair

Matt Baldwin, Baldwin Farms, Hinesburg
\$40,000 to build a winter outdoor feeding area to comply with organic rules

Jeff Dunklee, Vern-Mont Farm, Vernon
\$33,844 to expand a barn for improved herd management

Clement, Larry, Paul, Gisele, & Robert Gervais and Katherine Lawyer-Hale, Gervais Family Farm, Enosburg
\$35,000 for a parlor upgrade with milk monitoring equipment

AnnMarie Gillilan, Quarry Hill Farm, Jeffersonville
\$15,250 for cow comfort stalls and improved ventilation

Brian & Cindy Kayhart, Chalker Farm, Vergennes
\$3,000 to resurface a barn floor

Kirk & Katrina Lanphear, Lanphear Farm, Hyde Park
\$40,000 for a cow tracking system to monitor cow health and proactively identify cows needing attention

Tom & Mary Machia, Tommary Holsteins, St. Albans
\$25,000 for a new bulk tank and milk house renovation

Mark Magnan, Magnan Brothers Maquam Shore Dairy, St. Albans
\$40,000 for a cow tracking system to monitor cow health

Rhonda Miller & Myles Goodrich, Molly Brook Farm, Cabot
\$40,000 for a new milkhouse roof and to replace and relocate bulk tank

Aaron & Chantale Nadeau, Top Notch Holsteins, Holland
\$14,000 to upgrade manure management and ventilation

Paul & Becky Plouffe, Plouffe Family Farm, Bridport
\$20,250 to replace a bulk tank

Matt & Jeannine Rainville, Rainville Dairy, Highgate
\$40,000 for a barn construction project

Brendan & Marcy Schreindorfer, Windy Hill Farm, Enosburg Falls
\$35,000 for a robotic milking system

Robert & Normand Thibault, Robert and Normand Thibault Farm, Colchester
\$40,000 for a wastewater and manure storage system

Lorenzo Whitcomb, North Williston Cattle Company, Williston
\$16,450 for purchasing a no-till cover crop drill



**Gervais Family Farm, Enosburg
2018 Dairy Improvement Grantee**



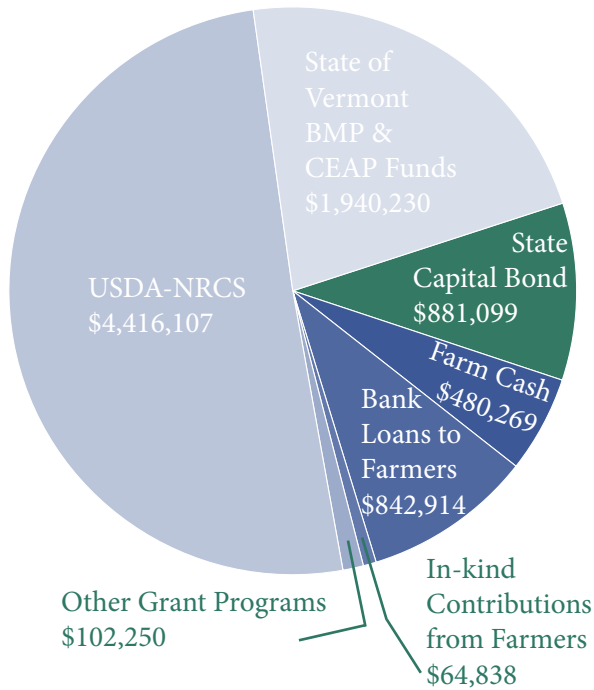
Water Quality Grants

Karen and Patrick O'Donnell milk Holstein cows on their farm in Westfield, located along the headwaters of the Missisquoi River. In October 2017, the O'Donnells were awarded a VHC B Water Quality Grant to purchase a manure injection system. This will help the farm manage phosphorus and nitrogen levels in the soil, reduce nutrient runoff, and increase crop yields. In 2017, the O'Donnells were also awarded a Dairy Improvement Grant to construct a new manure storage facility, a project which also received funding from USDA-NRCS and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

The Water Quality Grants Program, funded by the State of Vermont's Capital Construction and Bonding Act, helps farmers make water quality-related capital improvements to farm infrastructure. As of the end of 2018, the Viability Program has awarded \$881,099 in grants to 29 farms. Grantees are located across the state, including in the high priority St. Albans Bay, Missisquoi Bay, and South Lake portions of Lake Champlain. Water Quality Grants typically support farmers in paying for projects or project components that state and federal grant programs cannot cover, or in some cases assist farmers who are otherwise unable to meet all of their required match for state and federal funding. Anticipated outcomes include improvements in compliance with the Required Agricultural Practices, soil health, environmental stewardship, labor efficiency, animal welfare, energy efficiency, job creation, and employee safety. Grantees include a range of farms: dairy and livestock; small and large; organic and conventional.

Total funding of all projects

\$8,727,708 of VHC B & leveraged funds



“Using a concrete barnyard with runoff collection rather than old barnyards with old curbs or animal access to muddy fields, we will improve water quality in the Dead Creek watershed.”

—Melanie Harrison, Addison

Photo: VLT

Melanie and Patrick Harrison own Harrison's Homegrown, a conserved, organic dairy located on 432 acres in Addison. In 2017, the Harrisons used a construction loan and a \$25,000 Water Quality Grant to build a bedded pack barn to be able to bring their heifers, boarded off-site at the time, back to the farm and to facilitate management of their cows and their waste in accordance with the RAPs. Concurrently, the Harrisons have made barnyard and wastewater management improvements with assistance from USDA-NRCS EQIP and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture's Best Management Practices program. The new barn has resulted in increased labor efficiencies for the farm, as well as simpler and more effective waste management and increased cow comfort.

Water Quality Grantees

*29 farms awarded a total of \$881,099,
leveraging an additional \$7,846,609 in investments, nearly 9:1.
(Jul. 1, 2017 - Dec. 31, 2018)*

Equipment

Greg Bouchard, Bouchard Family Dairy, Franklin,
\$40,000

Seth & Brian Leach, Woodlawn Holsteins, Pawlet,
\$25,000

Patrick & Karen O'Donnell, O'Donnell Farm, Westfield,
\$14,040

Barnyard Structures & Improvements

Chris & Annie Wagner, Green Dream Farm, Franklin,
\$40,000

Marc & Cheryl Cesario, Meeting Place Pastures,
Cornwall, \$20,450

Composting Bedded Pack Barns

Laurie & Daniel Brooks, Wayward Goose Farm, West
Pawlet, \$40,000

Melanie & Patrick Harrison, Harrison's Homegrown,
Addison, \$25,000

Richard Hulett, Stonebroke Farm, Pawlet, \$40,000

Nate & Jessie Rogers, Rogers Farmstead, Berlin, \$40,000

Fencing & Grazing Infrastructure

Brian & Cindy Kayhart, Chalker Farm, Vergennes,
\$11,829

Marc & Tiffany Marquis, Marquis Organic Dairy Farm,
Newport Center, \$3,686

Wastewater Management

Jennifer & Jesse Lambert, Lambert Farm, Washington,
\$10,000

Julie Longway, Longway Farms, Swanton, \$40,000

Manure Storage & Other Manure Management

Andy & Sarah Birch, Maple Grove Farm, Derby, \$40,000

Dana & Wendy Burkewitz, Breezy Valley Farm, Westfield,
\$34,375

Ken Leach & Joanne Chickering, Ken Leach Farm, North
Rupert, \$40,000

AnnMarie Gillilan, Quarry Hill Farm, Jeffersonville,
\$16,750

Brian, Chanin, Ronald, Brian, Joanne, & Kevin Hill, Four
Hills Farm Partnership, Bristol, \$20,000

Matt & Jennifer Hull, Dalestead Farm and Maple,
Enosburg Falls, \$40,000

James Jones, Jones Farm, Craftsbury, \$39,469

Ramsay & Caroline Mellish, Standard Milk, Cornwall,
\$35,000

Justin & Angeline Poulin, Poulin & Daughters Family
Farm, Brookfield, \$10,500

Jamie & Laura Rivers, J & L Dairy, Troy, \$40,000

Jacques & Roberta Royer, J&R Family Farm, North Troy,
\$40,000

Jeremy & Jennie Russo, Southwind Farm, North Rupert,
\$40,000

Caleb & Jessie Smith, Dorset Peak Jerseys, Danby, \$40,000

Ron Sweet, Jr., Bedrock Farm, Georgia, \$25,000

Tracy & Glen Tupper, Tupper Farm, Benson, \$30,000

Mark & Cecile Vosburg, Vosburg Farm, Swanton, \$40,000



The Albany Community Trust is re-opening a general store in Albany Village that was destroyed by fire several years ago. As the only retail store in town, the community has felt its loss deeply. The goal of the reopening is to create a gathering place, increase property values, create jobs, and spark civic pride. REDI helped Albany Community Trust access \$90,000 from USDA Rural Development, which in turn leveraged an additional \$80,000 in other grants.

Many small towns and businesses in rural areas are limited in their ability to make their communities more vibrant, livable, and economically robust by a lack of capacity to find funding for critical projects. The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), created by the Legislature in 2017, helps bridge this gap by assisting with fundraising strategy and hiring skilled grant writers on behalf of businesses and communities, leading to more successful grant proposals. REDI works closely with partners such as Regional Development Corporations, Regional Planning Commissions, and state and federal agencies to identify projects ready to seek funding for implementation.

In the first year of the program, VHCB used \$75,000 in REDI funds to hire grant writers and provide technical assistance for 12 projects seeking \$2 million in funding. Ten of the 12 projects successfully secured \$1.78 million dollars in grants for communities from Albany to Pownal. Utilizing REDI funds for grant writing is an effective leverage point to bring money into small communities, with an average cost of \$5,700 and an average return of \$177,000 per project in grant funds in FY18.



The Pownal Trails Association and Empower Pownal were formed out of a community visit process with the Vermont Council on Rural Development. These groups collaborated to redevelop a former brownfield site into an outdoor recreation location with trails, parking, and river access, and utilized REDI to help them secure a grant from the Recreation Trails Program.

Work on the second year of the program is well underway with commitments to ten projects and outreach for 5-7 more. FY19 projects include the redevelopment of the Bridgewater School into a multi-use business and community hub and the expansion of outdoor recreation infrastructure at the NorthWoods Stewardship Center in Island Pond.

“The store was where everyone met each other, getting groceries or stopping in for coffee or gas. It’s the only retail in town and has really created a hole in the fabric of our community since the fire closed it down in 2014.”

— Hannah Pearce, Albany Community Trust



Last year, Runamok Maple purchased the former Morse Hardwoods/Milton Bradley plant in Fairfax in order to expand. To help finance this expansion, Runamok Maple turned to the REDI program, which helped the company access a \$250,000 USDA Value Added Producer Grant to increase production and hire 15 new staff. Runamok expects this expansion will result in an additional 30 jobs over the next two years as they grow the brand nationally.

2018 Rural Economic Development Projects

Albany - The Albany Community Trust used REDI to secure a \$90,000 USDA Rural Development grant for general store renovation and fit-up.

Charlotte - Clemmons Family Farm was awarded \$350,000 from the nationally competitive ArtPlace America Program to establish an arts and cultural center focused on African American heritage.

Hardwick - The Town of Hardwick was awarded \$39,000 from USDA Rural Development for the Yellow Barn, a business incubator and manufacturing facility, and also used REDI to create a long-term fundraising plan.

Fairfax - Runamok Maple accessed \$250,000 from USDA Rural Development's Value Added Producer Grant Program to expand the business and move production from Brattleboro to Fairfax.

Irasburg - Ardelia Farm received a \$28,000 USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant to build a lab for flower breeding propagation that will benefit flower farmers across the country and grow their business.

Lyndonville - The village successfully applied to USDA Rural Development for \$51,000 towards the construction of a downtown co-working facility.

Newport - The Vermont Land Trust and local partners raised \$678,000 from three federal grant sources to connect Newport's downtown to a popular pre-existing bike route to Quebec.

Newport - Newport was awarded \$250,000 from the competitive USDA Rural Community Development Initiative for a downtown development and recreation strategy, and to strengthen the Newport Downtown Development Organization.

Pownal - The Pownal Trails Association was awarded \$24,000 from the Recreation Trails Program to develop a trail and recreation site on a remediated brownfield site on the Hoosic River.

Windham County - The Windham County Solid Waste Management District received \$17,000 from USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities Grant Program to expand composting infrastructure to meet Act 148 requirements.

\$75,000
of REDI Funds



\$1.78M
in additional Grant Funds



Stonebroke Farm Pawlet

Richard Hulett owns Stonebroke Farm, a conserved farm located on the Mettawee River in the high priority South Lake watershed. Hulett sought assistance from USDA-NRCS EQIP and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture's Best Management Practices program for the engineering and construction of a composting bedded pack barn and a wastewater collection system which captures all manure and silage leachate. Even with state and federal assistance, the farm was still responsible for a significant sum. In 2017, VHCB awarded the farm a \$40,000 Water Quality Grant, which helped make the overall project feasible. The farm credits the project with not only supporting improvements in environmental stewardship and RAP compliance, but also soil health and animal welfare.

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www.vhcb.org/viability

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This report is made by the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, pursuant to 6 V.S.A. § 4710(f) & 10 V.S.A. § 325m

Front cover above: Eugenie Doyle, Silas Doyle-Burr & Sam Burr, owners of Last Resort Farm in Monkton. Below: Isaac Pearl, owner of Towhead LLC in Danville.