



Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

House Committee on Agriculture & Forestry

Thursday, January 24, 2018



30 Years of Housing & Conservation

Since 1987, VHCB funding has helped protect, conserve and create:

- 267,900 acres of working forests, natural areas and recreational lands
- 13,000 affordable homes – rental and homeownership
- 167,000 acres of farmland on 725 farms
- 70 historic buildings have been restored for community use
- 800 businesses have enrolled in our Farm & Forest Viability Program
- 480 AmeriCorps members have served through VHCB AmeriCorps
- 2,550 homes and apartments with reduced lead paint hazards



VHCB Results: FY 2018 and FY 2019

What we accomplished

State Investment: \$38M
Leverage: \$160M

- 1,029 homes and apartments
- 42 farms; 6,063 acres conserved
- 2 historic preservation projects
- 22 projects conserved 3,220 acres of natural areas, forestland, and public recreational land
- 171 farm, food, and forest enterprises were provided business planning and technical assistance



Title 10: Conservation and Development

Chapter 15: VERMONT HOUSING AND CONSERVATION TRUST FUND

§ 302. Policy, findings, and purpose

- (a) The dual goals of creating affordable housing for Vermonters, and conserving and protecting Vermont's agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands are of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.

VHCB PROGRAMS

- Farmland Conservation
- Forestland, Recreational Land and Natural Area Conservation
- Farmland Access
- Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program
- Water Quality Grants
- Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)
- Multi-Family Housing Development and Preservation
- Home Ownership
- Home Access
- Healthy & Lead-Safe Homes
- AmeriCorps
- Community Planning & Technical Assistance
- Historic Preservation
- Modular Housing Innovation Program
- Housing Opportunities for Persons living with HIV/AIDS

Franklin Homestead, Franklin



Franklin Homestead, with 23 one- and two-bedroom, independent living apartments for seniors age 55 and over, opened in 1993. Franklin Carriage House offers assisted living homes in studio apartments with supportive services provided.

West River Valley Senior Housing, Townshend



Operated by Valley Cares, West River Valley Senior Housing offers 24 independent living apartments and 28 units of assisted living with nurse-supervised care. In 2013 another 12 apartments were added offering independent living with support services.



Mac's
MARKET

Richford Health Center
Pharmacy Now Open

In Richford, a former furniture factory was converted to create housing on the upper stories with commercial space on the ground floor.

Housing Revenue Bond Initiative

Vermonters Moving into New Homes



Putney – 18 new apartments
in three buildings around a

To date, HRB has funded 19 projects with 468 homes in 15 different communities across 8 counties plus accessibility improvements and Habitat for Humanity homes statewide.

The first 86 homes are in Putney, South Burlington and Brattleboro.

On track to target 25% of the homes to households \leq 50% of median and target 25% to households between 80 and 120% of median.

VHCB Farmland Conservation 1987 – 2018

- 167,000 acres of farmland on 725 farms
(190,000 acres total – 15.8% of VT's ag land)
- All farms in active ag production
- More than 11% of prime/statewide soils protected
- 430 include the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value



What was achieved: VHCB Farmland Conservation Investments FY 2018 – December 2018

FY 2019

22 farms (including 2 retroactive OPAVs)
2,879 acres
17 include water quality easement
protections
Approximately 11 miles of buffers protected
10 transfers: 5 to new farmers;
2 intergenerational, 3 to existing farmers

FY 2018

23 farms (including 2 retroactive OPAVs)
3,184 acres
19 include water quality easement protections
Over 13 miles of riparian buffers protected
14 transfers: 5 to new farmers;
4 intergenerational, 5 to existing farmers



Conserving working forests & supporting the forest economy

- The Vermont forest products industry contributes 10,555 jobs and \$1.5 billion in economic output, including value-added manufacturing and tourism.
- Forests provide a backdrop for Vermont's world-class tourism industry and boost rural economies, as demonstrated by the Westford Town Forest, Mount Ascutney in West Windsor, and Kingdom Trails, all conserved with VHCB funding.
- VHCB has protected 7 town forests totaling 2,083 acres over the past three years.
- The Viability Program has worked with more than 50 foresters, loggers, and forest products businesses, and provides succession planning services to forest landowners.

West Windsor Town Forest



With VHCB support, the Trust for Public Land added 468 acres to the West Windsor Town Forest and conserved the entire 1,582 acres. The land will be managed for recreation, wildlife habitat protection, sustainable timber harvesting, and water quality protection. Recreational use of an extensive trail network will grow West Windsor's economy following the closure of Ascutney Mountain resort.

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Ridge

A 27-year effort by the Windmill Hill Pinnacle and Putney Mountain Associations, supported with VHCB grants, has conserved 26 miles of trails and 2,100 acres in Rockingham, Athens, Grafton, Brookline, and Westminster.



Rainbow Rock, Chester



Rainbow Rock Swimming Hole was conserved by the Vermont River Conservancy with VHCB funding in 2017, protecting permanent public access to this popular swimming destination within walking distance of the village.



Choiniere Family Farm, Highgate Mississquoi Bay Watershed

The Choinieres implemented numerous conservation practices, installing buffers along the river, cattle lanes and fencing, and keeping manure under cover using bedded pack barns. The farm now produces milk without feeding grain. The Choinieres purchased a neighboring conserved farm last year, and sold river corridor restrictions along the Rock River.



VHCB and Water Quality

- Adopted Water Quality and Flood Resilience Guidelines and revised Conservation of Agricultural Lands policy to incorporate water quality/flood resilience attributes
- Management (ALE) plans are now required to address soil health and water quality prior to closing on a farm easement
- Special easement language protects surface waters
- Pledged over \$5 million match to the state's \$16 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) award from NRCS:
20 farms funded with 16 closed
- The VHCB Farm & Forest Viability Program has awarded \$881,099 in water quality grants to 29 farms, and \$492,302 in dairy improvement grants to 17 farms

O'Donnell Farm, Westfield



“Many of our on-farm management decisions are based on working around the rivers and respecting the value of clean water. We believe that using this equipment will enhance and improve water quality and strengthen farm viability.”

– Karen O'Donnell

Paul Lisai, Sweet Rowen Farm, Albany

“Buying land is one of the most difficult hurdles for new farmers. We were fortunate to work with the Vermont Land Trust to secure a farm to own and grow our business. With land of our own it will be easier to plan for the future.”

— Paul Lisai



Paul sells milk and 10 varieties of cheese throughout northern and central Vermont. He also sells milk to AgriMark. Viability participant.

Scott and Mark Bessette, Highgate

- Selling development rights helped reduce debt and facilitate a family transfer.
- \$354,000 in VHCB and NRCS-RCPP funding to conserve 154 acres of cropland for this MFO dairy farm. Home farm already conserved.
- Water quality protections include riparian buffers along 2,780 feet of the Rock River.



Jeep & Joann Madison, Shoreham

The Madisons operate a 75-cow organic dairy. Three times VHCB has helped them secure their land base: the 85-acre home farm in 2006; 97 additional acres in 2009; and a third parcel in 2016 (using RCPP federal \$\$.) With enough land base for the current herd size, reliance on expensive purchased feed has been eliminated. Jeep and Joann's 24-year-old son is integral to the farm operation and will be a part owner in the future.





Little Outdoor Giants photo

Horster Farm (Shire Beef), Vershire

A 116-acre beef farm conserved with VHCB & NRCS funding. Special protections in the conservation easement for wetlands and riparian areas along the Upper Ompompanoosuc River.

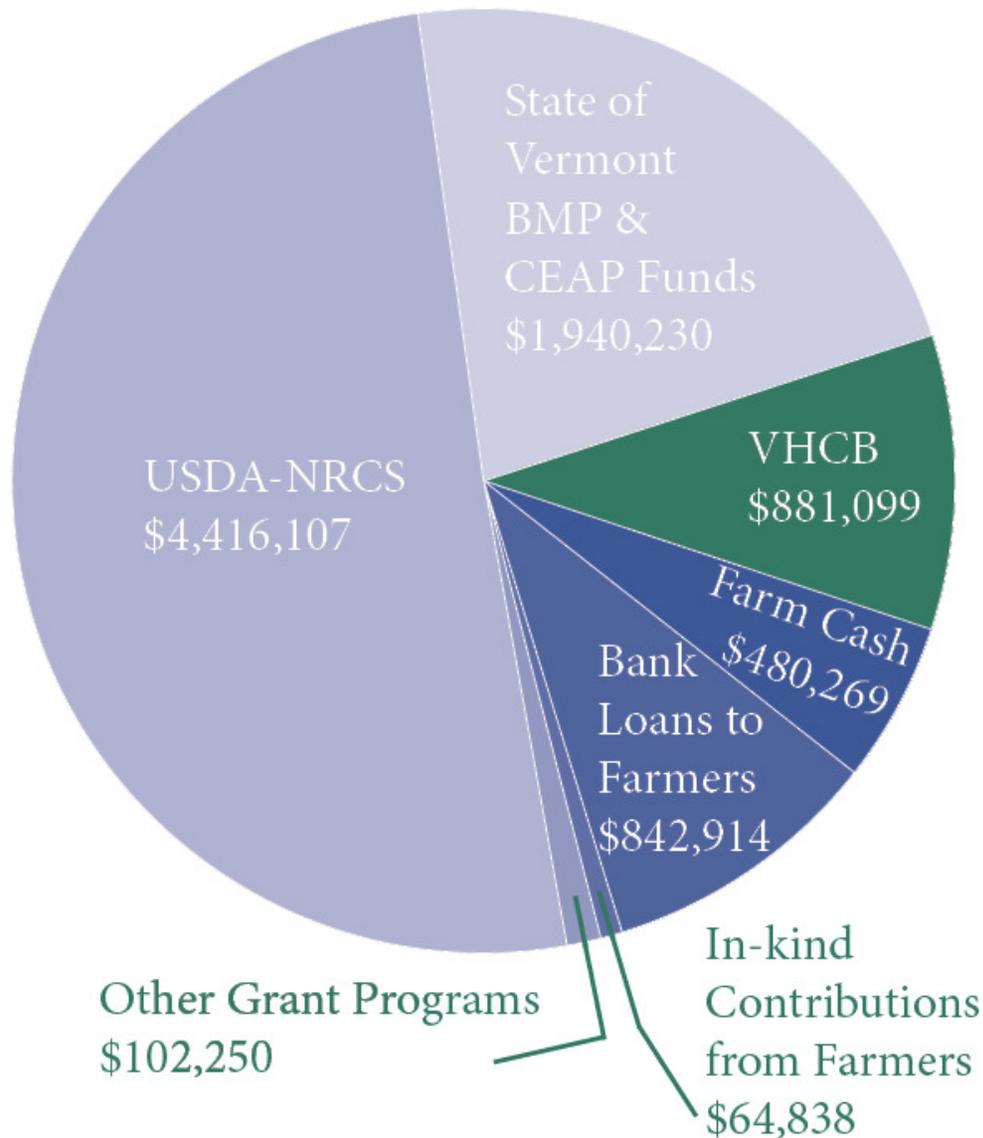


Corey and Ann Chapman Farm, Tunbridge

- 50-cow organic grass-based dairy conserved in 2017
- Conservation reduced debt and provided cost share for EQIP
- Extensive frontage on First Branch of the White River
- Easement with 50-foot riparian buffers along the river and a wetland protection zone
- River corridor overlay easement
- Manure pit, barnyard, and fencing being installed with NRCS assistance

Water Quality Grants

Total funding for all projects



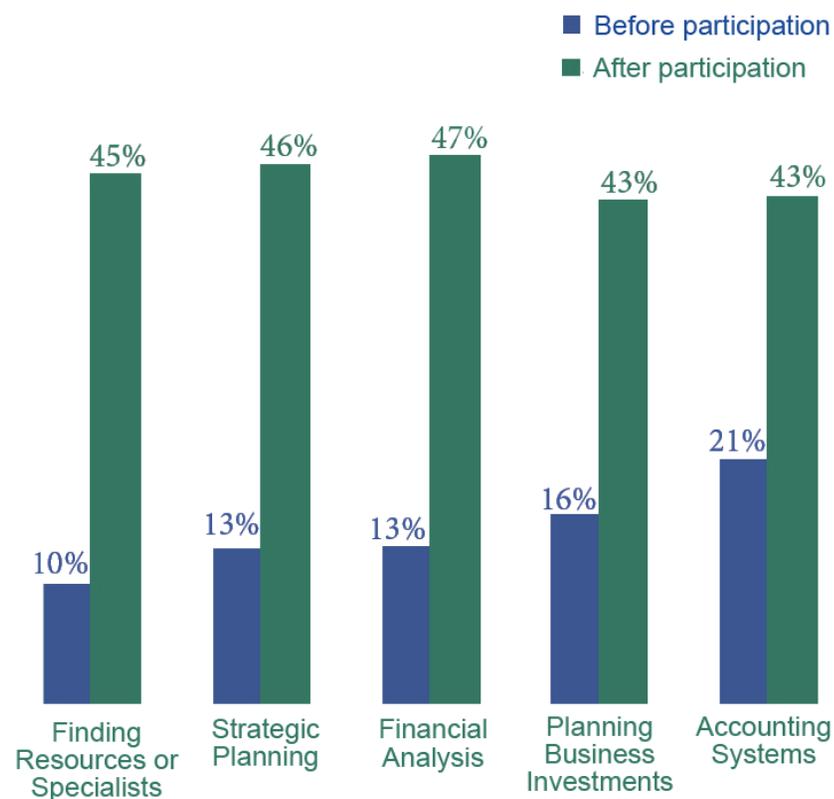
In FY18 & FY19, 29 farms were awarded a total of \$881,099 in capital bill funds, leveraging an additional \$7.8 million in other investments for water quality infrastructure improvement projects.

VHCB

Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

- 16 years of in-depth advising
- More than 800 businesses have completed business plans
- 30% of enrollees are conserved

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*



VT Farm & Forest Viability Program in 2018

85 farms received business or transfer planning services

41 farms received a second year of services

18 farms received shorter-term business coaching

5 food hubs received strategic planning assistance

16 forest products businesses received technical assistance

27 loggers attended 2 business management workshops

23 family forestland owners and consulting foresters attended 2 succession planning workshops

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

17 farms received Dairy Improvement Grants

29 farms received Water Quality Grants

Total enrolled Viability clients: 171

Tamarack Vermont Sheep Farm, Corinth

“The Viability Program made a huge difference for us. We took out another loan this year and doubled in size again; we'll go into the winter with 200 ewes. We now own some land and a barn, and we lease another 90 acres, much of which we are renovating through rotational grazing and soil amendments.”



Champlain Orchards, Shoreham

Bill Suhr enrolled in 2004, the program's second client. He worked with the Viability Program on business planning and was later awarded a grant for apple processing equipment for his value-added pie enterprise.



Brookside Timber Harvesting, Westminster

“It was great to have the program tailored around my schedule and what my business needs . . . being able to read financial statements is just as important as looking at a timber lot.”

- Jon Parker



Aires Hill Farm, Berkshire



A \$40,000 Dairy Improvement Grant from VHCB helped Karie Atherton install a herd health monitoring system, which will “make the farm more efficient through constant monitoring, allow us to use fewer antibiotics and hormones, and will rid our herd of contagious mastitis to ensure farm viability for the next generation to come.”



Photo: Cellars at Jasper Hill

Cellars at Jasper Hill, Greensboro

In 2015, the Viability Program helped the Cellars hire Steve Voigt, the former CEO of King Arthur Flour, to assist with human resources and staff growth.



Photos : Smokeshire Hilltop Farm



Smokeshire Hilltop Farm, Chester

Donna McNeill-Hudkins & Peter Hudkins operate a small, diversified farm, selling berries and lamb, logging with horses, and offering agritourism, including sleigh rides. In 2013, the Viability Program helped them move out of start-up phase and address production challenges, marketing, and plan for business growth.



Photo: Food Connects

The Viability Program also provides business, financial, and strategic planning to local food hubs, like Food Connects in Windham County.



Rural Economic Development Initiative

FY18: \$75,000 special appropriation helped

10 rural enterprises and

small towns secure \$1.78 million

in federal, state, and philanthropic funding

FY19: VHCB will assist with an additional 14-16 projects,

11 projects are already underway



Rural Economic
Development Initiative

Priority Areas

- Agriculture & Composting
- Forest Products Sector
- Outdoor Recreation
- Downtown Community Development & Historic Preservation

Rural Economic Development Initiative

Year 1 Projects:

- **Albany** – general store rehabilitation
- **Charlotte** - arts and cultural center
- **Fairfax** - expansion of Runamok Maple
- **Hardwick** – Yellow Barn Project business incubator/multi-use
- **Irasburg** – propagation lab for Ardelia Farm
- **Lyndonville** – coworking facility
- **Newport** – Bluffside trail development
- **Newport** – downtown development & recreation strategy
- **Pownal** - recreational trail development
- **Windham County** - equipment for expansion of composting

Year 2 Projects:

- **Craftsbury** – outdoor recreation infrastructure
- **Bridgewater** – school building redevelopment
- **Chelsea** – general store feasibility
- **Cabot** – artisanal cheese facility
- **Jeffersonville** – village water system
- **New Haven** – cured meat facility
- **Newport** – mountain bike/ski trail building
- **Island Pond** – outdoor recreation infrastructure
- **Poultney** – downtown park
- **Readsboro** – broadband internet expansion

Rural Economic Development Initiative Craftsbury

REDI is helping the town of Craftsbury fundraise from multiple grant sources to increase connections between outdoor recreation resources, and to improve transportation and signage in town to accommodate increased visitors.



Rural Economic
Development Initiative

Chelsea Community Store

Up until recently, Chelsea had two general stores. The REDI program is helping the town and newly formed Chelsea Community Store, Inc. assess the feasibility of purchasing a general store and then applying for funding from the Vermont Community Development Program.



“Recent store closures have left Chelsea and the surrounding communities with an urgent need for access to fresh foods and a full range of grocery.”

– Dickson Corbitt,
Chelsea resident

Gus Seelig, Executive Director

Nancy Everhart, Agricultural Director

Liz Gleason, Viability Program Manager



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