Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

ANNUAL REPORT

2019

A PROGRAM OF THE
VERMONT HOUSING & CONSERVATION BOARD

A LETTER TO LEGISLATORS

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program serves to strengthen Vermont's working lands economy and rural communities by providing in-depth advising and succession planning services to businesses and family forestland owners, as well as administering grant programs to support investment for future growth.

In FY19, 170 farm, food, and forest products enterprises received coaching to develop business and transfer plans. Clients reported improvements in essential skills as well as increased sales, profits, and an average 10% job growth after participation. As the working lands sector faces continued market-based challenges and increasingly severe impacts of climate change, our services foster resilience among Vermont businesses and communities through concerted planning, capacity building, and investment in our landscape.

Our efforts to increase business acumen and facilitate landowner transitions reduce land fragmentation and support our rural economy. Additionally, targeted grant-making enables us to improve farm viability while furthering clean water initiatives. With funding from the Capital Construction and Bonding Act, in FY19 we awarded $702,377 in grants for water quality improvements on 22 farms, leveraging nearly $5.3M. We also awarded $410,944 in Dairy Improvement Grants to 12 farms with funding from Commonwealth Dairy, leveraging nearly $700,000.

This annual report also shares the results of the Rural Economic Development Initiative, which provided grant writing assistance to small municipalities and businesses for its second year. Over two years, $150,000 has supported 16 successful applications, securing more than $2.3M for Vermont communities. Three additional projects seeking $2.5M have applications pending.

Scaling the impact of our work, in 2019 we provided leadership among regional and national partners to coordinate and strengthen farm and forest viability services. The Northern Border Regional Commission awarded the Viability Program $624,060 to advance the agricultural economy by developing a Northeast Peer Alliance to enhance services across four states. Additionally, founded by VHCB and with our ongoing support, the National Farm Viability Conference brought together 300 advising professionals in Red Wing, Minnesota to exchange knowledge and resources.

We look forward to continuing to provide services that empower our working lands communities in 2020 and thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Gustave Seelig, Executive Director
Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Secretary Anson Tebbetts
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

Commissioner Michael Snyder
Vermont Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation

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 farm, food, and forest products enterprises.

OUR NETWORK OF SERVICE PROVIDERS:

Center for an Agricultural Economy

INTERVALE CENTER

Land For Good

Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont NOFA-VT Since 1971

The University of Vermont Extension

Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Vermont Woodlands Association

Cover Photo: Donegan Family Dairy, Charlotte

AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR WORK

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program empowers working lands owners and stewards across the state, providing them with skills, tools, resources, and a support network, to enhance their businesses as well as their quality of life.

Our Viability Network of business assistance professionals provide coaching and advising tailored to the individual needs of each client. We also engage in targeted grant-making, capacity building, and facilitating sector-level collaboration to support vibrant rural communities.

TARGET IMPACT AREAS & OUTCOMES IN 2019

Empowerment: Building Skills & Targeted Assistance

- 170 farm, food, and forest products enterprises received business coaching to develop business and transfer plans
- 76 loggers and forest landowners attended 5 statewide workshops, improving their business skills

Planning for Bright Futures: Land Ownership Transition

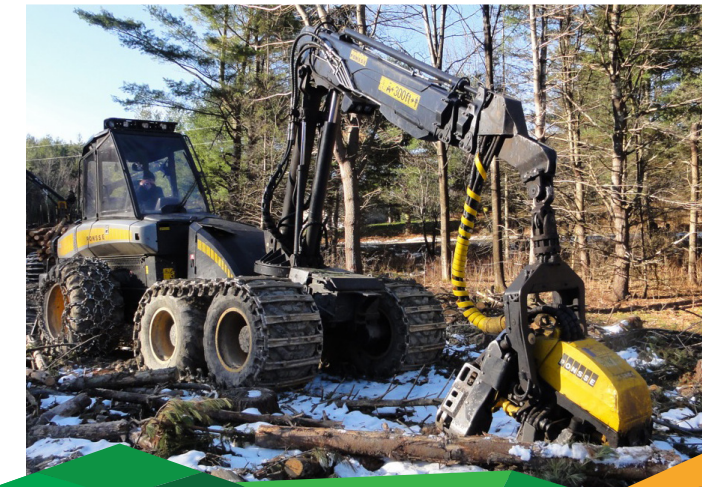
- Nearly 1/3 of business advising clients engaged in succession or transfer planning, reflecting aging demographics in the agriculture and forestry sectors
- 6 of 7 family forestland owners receiving advising on land succession and estate planning felt their successors were better prepared to take on ownership of the land

Investing in Working Lands Owners & Stewards: Targeted Grant-Making

- 34 grants, totaling more than $1.1M and leveraging an additional $5.98M, awarded to farms to invest in the future of their business through infrastructure improvements and innovative technologies

Capacity Building & Connection: Strengthening Rural Communities

- Supported 13 small communities with fundraising strategy and grant applications, garnering $566,194 in grants for 6 projects thus far, with an additional $2.5M pending
- Coordinated the 2019 National Farm Viability Conference in Red Wing, MN, with more than 300 attendees from 32 states coming together to build skills and expand professional networks



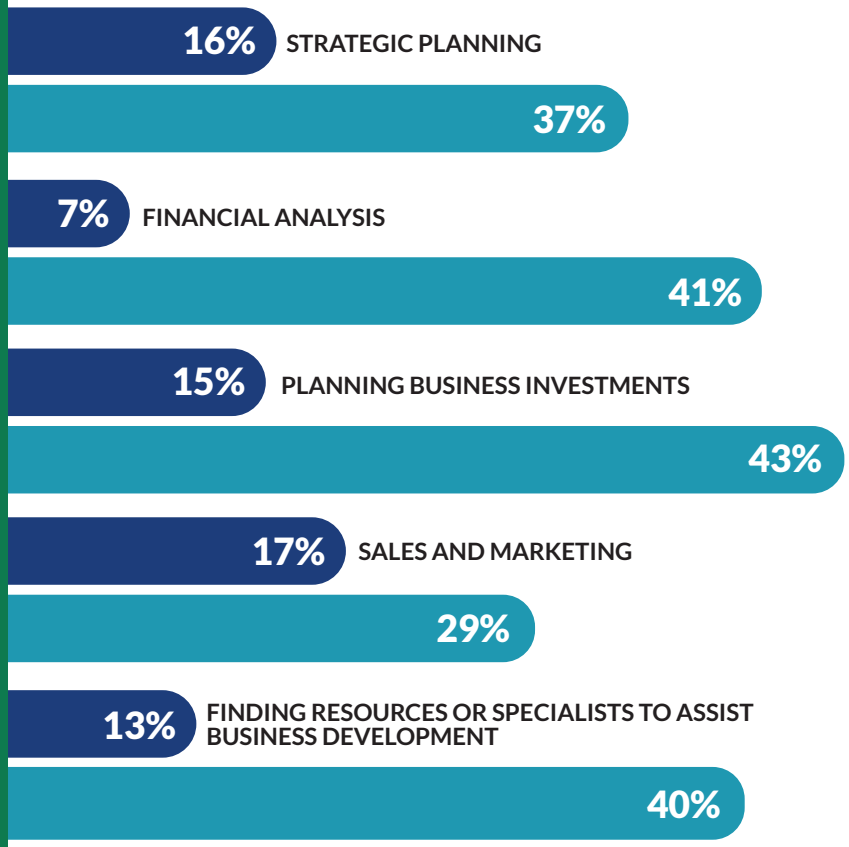
EMPOWERMENT:
BUILDING SKILLS & TARGETED ASSISTANCE

In FY19, 170 farm, food, and forest enterprises received business advising services, including 68 new enrollees (see p.15 for a map of all participants). Since 2003 the Viability Program has provided in-depth, one-on-one advising to more than 800 farm and food businesses, and since 2013, has served 51 businesses in Vermont's forest products industry.

Tailored and holistic advising has improved financial and management skills as well as overall quality of life during a challenging time for the working lands sector. Clients reporting outcomes in 2019 improved their work-life balance, going from 16% being highly satisfied with work-life balance before enrolling to 40% after participation. Clients in this cohort also increased their ability to generate household income from their business after participation and 11% went from a net loss before participation to earning a positive income. These clients also represent a significant economic footprint: 232 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs and more than $21.3M in gross sales.

PERCENTAGE OF BUSINESSES REPORTING HIGH SKILLS IN:

● **Before** Program Participation
● **After** Program Participation



71% OF CLIENTS REPORTED INCREASED GROSS SALES

10% INCREASE IN JOBS (FTE) AFTER PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

NET INCOME INCREASED BY **124%** ON AVERAGE

STICKNEY FARM

ROCKINGHAM

ROBERT, BARBARA & RICHARD STICKNEY

The Stickney Farm, one of the last remaining farms in Rockingham, is a diversified livestock, feed, and sugaring operation that has been in the family since 1897. To keep the land accessible for their grandson Robert and future generations, Richard and Barbara Stickney worked with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) to conserve the farm with funding from VHCB and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The Stickneys enrolled in the Viability Program for support with this process and to plan for the farm's next chapter. Working with advisor Kevin Channell from the Intervale Center, Robert charted a path to profitability for his custom cattle boarding business, receiving support with accessing capital, arranging gradual purchase of the farm, and navigating the conservation easement process. Richard and Barbara also received assistance with retirement planning. With a full business plan, updated financials, and confidence in the future, the Stickneys successfully conserved their farm in the summer of 2019. "The business plan assistance from VHCB and working with Kevin was the best thing that could have happened," said Robert.

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

~ Robert Stickney

THIRD BRANCH HORSE LOGGING

BRAINTREE

DEREK O'TOOLE & BRAD JOHNSON

Third Branch Horse Logging is a partnership formed by Brad Johnson and Derek O'Toole. After a combined 25 years of farming with draft horses, they decided to partner and shift their focus to forestry, pairing horse power with small machinery to provide low-impact forest management. Working with UVM Extension's Chris Lindgren, they've been able to outline a formal business plan, analyze their finances and assets, and secure the equipment needed to expand their operation. To increase the visibility of their work, they also developed and launched a website and have engaged in public workshops and events, including an appearance on UVM's *Across the Fence*. With a deeper understanding of their costs, new capital investment, marketing tools, and a long-term plan in development, the team has built a foundation for success.

"The Viability Program is a unique business advising resource for the forest products industry. We have found it to be enormously beneficial in helping us understand our costs, clarify our goals, and frame our strategy to get where we want to be."

– Brad Johnson

GOLDEN RUSSET FARM

SHOREHAM

WILL, JUDY & PAULINE STEVENS

Golden Russet Farm is an 84-acre, certified organic vegetable farm and greenhouse operation managed by Will and Judy Stevens with their daughter, Pauline. Ready to begin the transition process, the family enrolled in the Viability Program to enhance the business, building on Pauline's skills and interests. While developing a transition plan with their Viability Program advisor, Mike Ghia of Land for Good, the family received technical assistance to advance Pauline's management skills and boost the farm's future profitability. Projects included adding cut flowers, streamlining greenhouse operations, improving field drainage, installing wash/pack infrastructure, and retirement planning for Will and Judy. The Stevens shared that "the biggest change so far has been with our communication habits. Mike enabled us to go deep into topics you tend to shy away from, which has been extremely helpful."

"We had clarity about Pauline taking over the farm, but what was unclear was how to make that happen. Working with the Viability Program has the ball rolling, which it wouldn't have without Mike's guidance. We feel that we are on the path to ensuring a successful intergenerational family transition to our daughter that will be both profitable for her and rewarding for us."

~ Judy & Will Stevens

PLANNING FOR BRIGHT FUTURES:
LAND OWNERSHIP TRANSITION

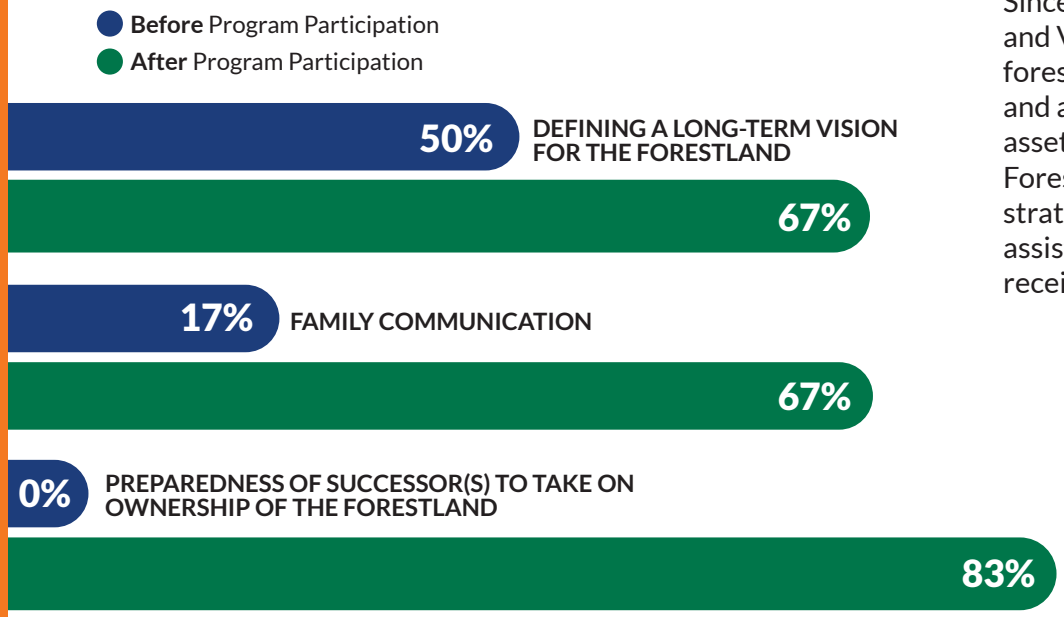
Ensuring Vermont's working lands remain productive and accessible for future generations requires concerted planning for businesses currently stewarding the land, new entrepreneurs, and family landowners. The Viability Program's service providers coach businesses and families in the development of transition or succession plans that meet present needs and future goals. Services also include coordinating critical technical assistance with legal and financial experts, estate planners, conservation professionals, mediators, and others.

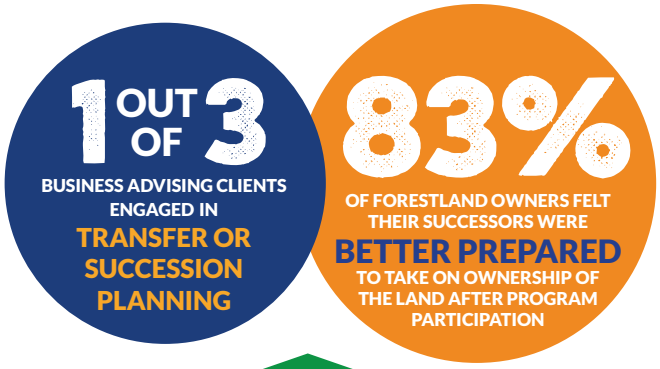
The report A 2018 Exploration of the Future of Vermont Agriculture underscores the need for investment in transition and succession planning as structural challenges affecting the dairy industry and downward price pressures for other producers result in loss of agricultural land. Furthermore, 91% of farmers over age 65 do not have a farm operator under 45 to succeed them. Responding to increasing need for support with succession planning and farmland access, we help exiting farmers prepare for retirement and provide business assistance to new and beginning farmers.

This work is carried out in close partnership with VHCB's Farmland Conservation Program and others as land conservation is a key tool for protecting agricultural resources and increasing farmland affordability. Together with the Vermont Land Trust and the Intervale Center, we've been able to expand coordinated land access and coaching services for Vermont's next generation of agricultural entrepreneurs with a $546,386 USDA Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program grant that extends through 2020.

Since 2015, we've also collaborated with Vermont Woodlands Association and VT Coverts to make succession planning services available to owners of forestland. Nearly 80% of Vermont's forest is privately owned by families, and a major driver of forest fragmentation is subdivision that occurs when assets pass from one generation to the next. According to the VT Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation's 2017 recommendations, one of the primary strategies to maintain forest integrity is to provide succession planning assistance to private owners of forestland. Seven forest landowning families received succession planning services in FY19.

PERCENTAGE OF FORESTLAND OWNERS WHO REPORT HIGH SATISFACTION IN:





SPRING BROOK FARM

WESTFIELD

LYLE "SPUD" & KITTY EDWARDS, SEBASTIEN LATRAVERSE

Lyle "Spud" and Kitty Edwards own Spring Brook Farm, a 165-acre organic dairy in Westfield conserved with the Vermont Land Trust. Managing the farm since 1977, the Edwards recognized the growing need to plan for transition, and found a successor in farmhand Sebastien LaTraverse. After earning a degree in Dairy Science, Seb expressed interest in succeeding Spud and Kitty on the farm. Working with the Intervale Center's Kevin Channell, the Edwards were able to form an LLC partnership, update their finances, plan for a comfortable retirement, and design a gradual transfer to Seb. The team was also awarded a $40,000 Water Quality Grant from the Viability Program to eliminate seasonal overflows from their manure storage, a long-term investment that will benefit the next generation. Comprehensive planning for incoming and outgoing owners, paired with investment in lasting infrastructure, has provided a clear path forward for the future of Spring Brook Farm.

HONEY FIELD FARM

NORWICH

ELI HERSH & VALERIE WOODHOUSE

Eli Hersh and Valerie Woodhouse began their organic produce farm on two leased acres in Fairfax, VT, where they gained experience working on their mentors' adjacent operation. They spent five years building up markets, establishing relationships with wholesalers, and saving funds to purchase their own land. When the time came to expand, Eli and Valerie landed on the 16-acre Killdeer Farm, a long-standing produce and greenhouse operation in Norwich listed on the Intervale Center's Vermont Land Link website. The team enrolled in the Viability Program for assistance with the complexities of land acquisition. Working with advisor Kevin Channell, Eli and Valerie developed a business model that would absorb transfer costs, retain Killdeer's clientele, and access new wholesale markets. They also arranged a gradual purchase plan with the farmland investment company, Dirt Capital Partners, and closed on the sale in fall 2019.

"The entire agricultural service provider community is really well connected – we really felt they had our backs and it was so comforting to know we had so many allies to reach out to at each stage of the process. If you're ready to take the next step in the future of your business, only good things can come from working with the Viability Program."

~ Eli Hersh & Valerie Woodhouse

BINGAMAN WOODS LLC

CORINTH & BROOKFIELD

BINGAMAN FAMILY

During frequent visits to Vermont, Coast Guard member John Bingaman formed a deep connection with the landscape. This led the Bingaman family to purchase land in Brookfield and later Corinth, totaling nearly 200 acres of largely forested wilderness. Though the Bingamans understood the need to plan for the long-term ownership of the land, the complexity of the process compelled John and his wife to seek assistance to engage the whole family in succession planning and to carry out the necessary legal processes. Through the Viability Program, the Bingaman Family worked with the advising team at Vermont Woodlands Association: forester Mary Sisock and family counselor and lawyer Audrey Winograd.

Audrey and Mary facilitated family discussions, helping each person share their attachment to the land and goals for its future. John and his wife were thrilled to discover that their daughters feel so strongly about the land as part of their heritage and also want to keep it productive for future generations. Audrey and Mary then advised the Bingamans about how to formalize their goals, helping them determine the right legal structure to keep the land intact for generations to come.

"Audrey and Mary informed us, focused us, and enabled us to engage our daughters better in the discussion. They helped spur the process toward success as we have secured the land in a Limited Liability Corporation, which will keep the land intact with a management plan going forward."

~ John Bingaman

"Whether you are already involved in the succession process, or don't have the slightest idea, I highly encourage families to utilize the resources available through the Viability Program to achieve their goals."

~ John Bingaman

INVESTING IN WORKING LANDS OWNERS & STEWARDS:
TARGETED GRANT-MAKING

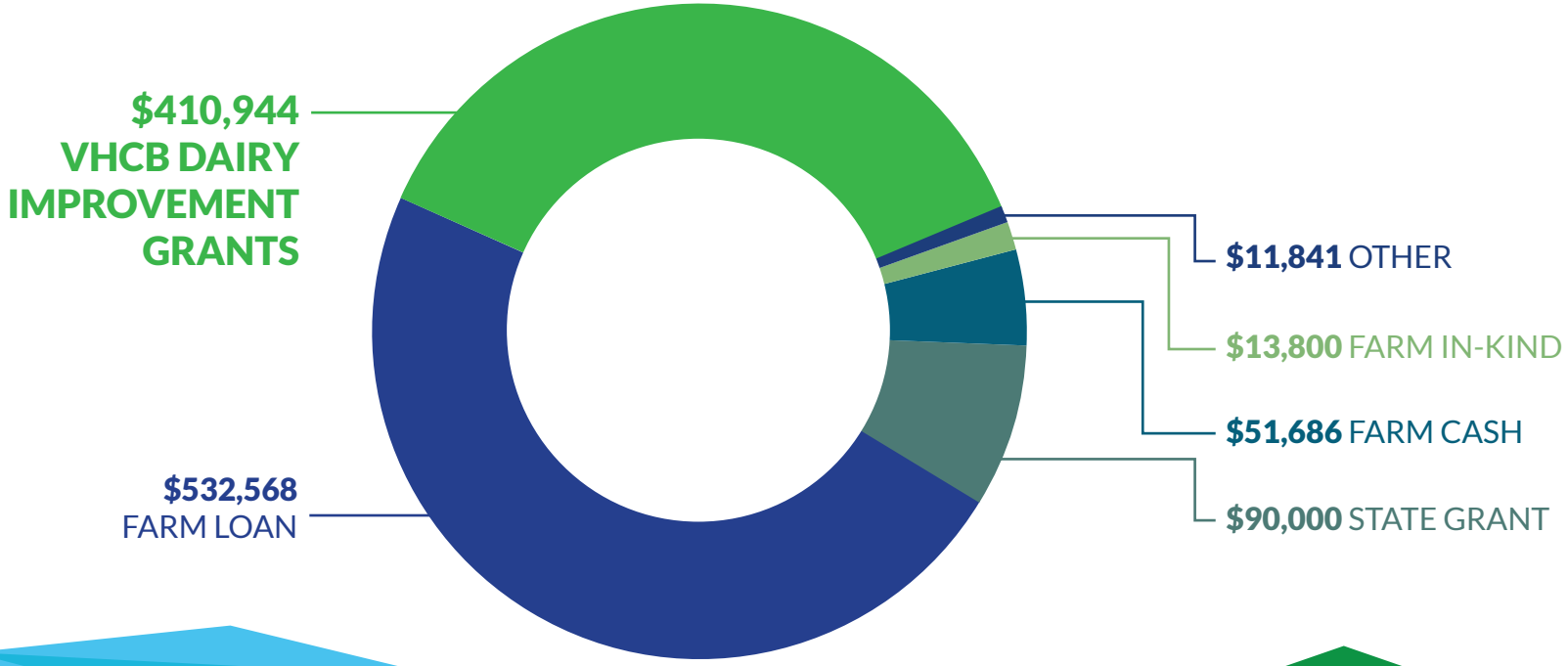
The Viability Program works with philanthropic, state and federal partners to make grants available to Vermont working lands businesses to invest in their future. In FY19, our grant programs focused on improving water quality, environmental stewardship, and assisting the dairy industry in making investments that support farm viability.

DAIRY IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

Our Dairy Improvement Grants Program has awarded nearly $1.9 million in grants to Vermont dairy farmers over the past 6 years, leveraging an additional $7.7 million in farm funds and state/federal resources. These grants are available to members of Dairy Farmers of America who supply milk to Commonwealth Dairy, the funder of this grant program. Grants are awarded to improve farm viability and enhance the quality and production of Vermont milk.

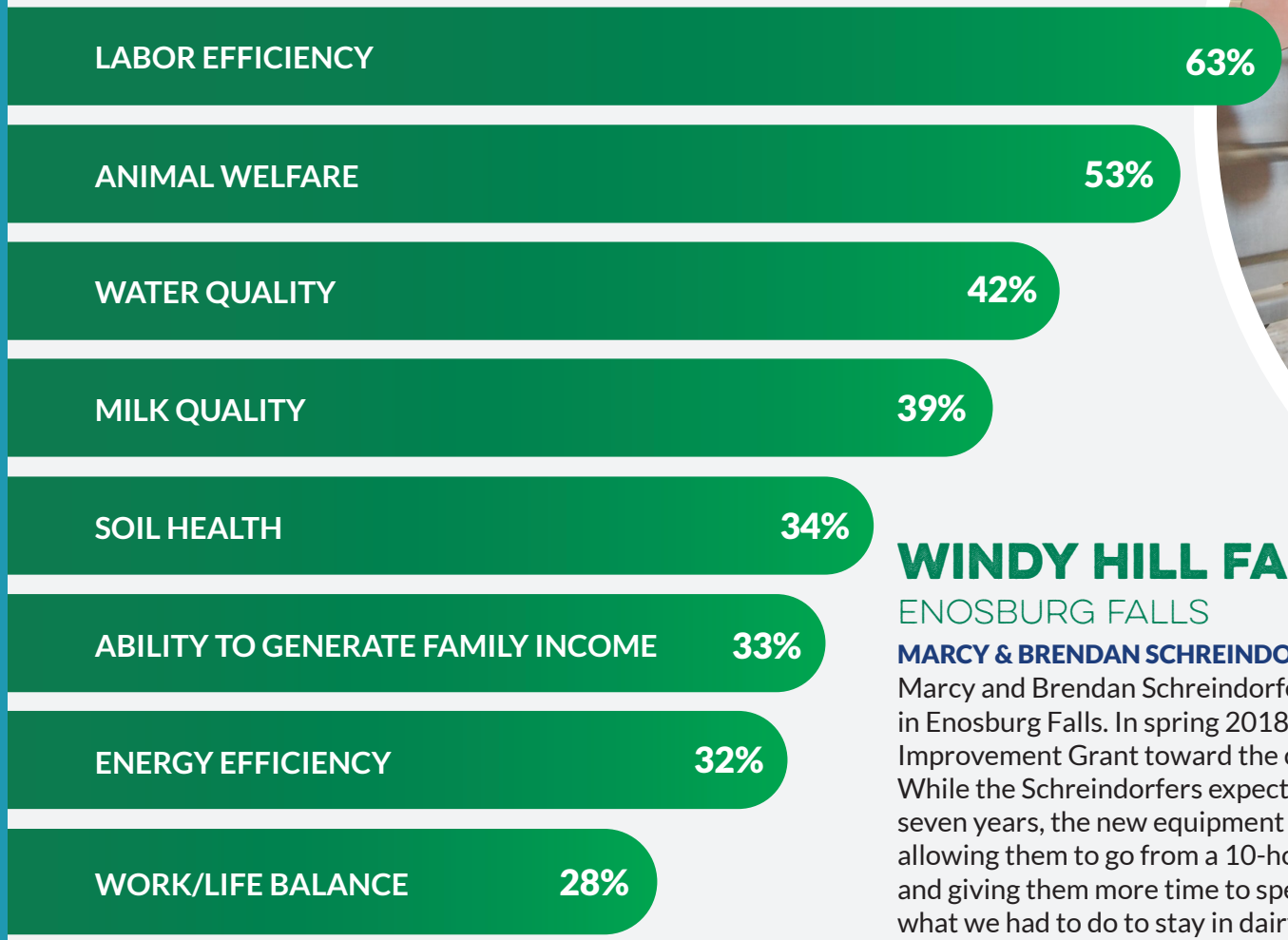
In FY19, the Viability Program awarded $410,944 in Dairy Improvement Grants to 12 Vermont dairy farms, leveraging an additional $699,895. This funding has enabled farmers to invest in infrastructure and equipment, resulting in improvements in employee safety and welfare, labor efficiency, animal welfare, milk quality, and environmental stewardship. Grantees are located across the state, are both conventional and organic, and include farms of all sizes. (Full list of grantees on p.16).

FUNDING SOURCES FOR FY19 PROJECTS
$1,110,839 OF VHCB & LEVERAGED FUNDS



DAIRY IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

FARM IMPROVEMENTS
PERCENTAGE OF GRANTEES WHO REPORTED IMPROVEMENTS IN:



WINDY HILL FARM
ENOSBURG FALLS

MARCY & BRENDAN SCHREINDORFER

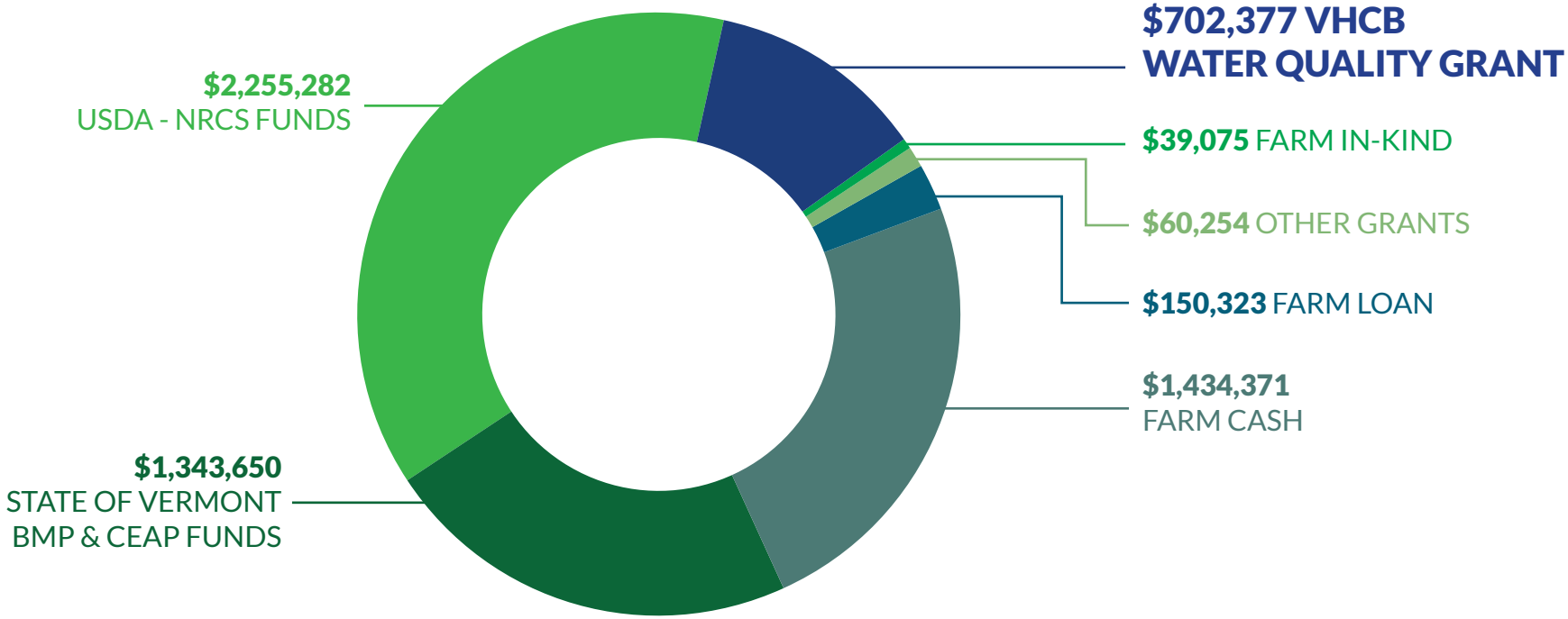
Marcy and Brendan Schreindorfer own and operate Windy Hill Farm in Enosburg Falls. In spring 2018, they were awarded a $35,000 Dairy Improvement Grant toward the cost of installing three robotic milking units. While the Schreindorfers expect to see a financial return on investment in seven years, the new equipment has already paid off in their personal lives, allowing them to go from a 10-hour workday to working 5-6 hours per day and giving them more time to spend with their three young children. “It’s what we had to do to stay in dairy farming,” says Brendan, noting it was especially challenging for them to find reliable labor to support the operation. Brendan and Marcy hope that the robotic milking units and other renovations to the barn will make the farm more attractive for their children to take over in the future.

WATER QUALITY GRANTS

Our 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. In FY19, the Viability Program awarded $702,377 in grants to 22 farms, leveraging nearly $5.3 million (a ratio of 7.5:1), to help farmers and the state meet clean water goals. Grantees are located across the state, including in the Lake Champlain, Lake Memphremagog, and Connecticut River watersheds.

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 with meeting the required match for state and federal funding. VHCB grants often complement state investments, with many large projects also receiving funds from Vermont Agency of Agriculture financial assistance programs like the Best Management Practices (BMP) Program and Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP). Outcomes have included improvements in compliance with the Required Agricultural Practices, soil health, environmental stewardship, labor efficiency, and animal welfare. Grantees include a range of farms: dairy and livestock; small and large; organic and conventional. (Full list of grantees on p.16).

FUNDING SOURCES FOR FY19 PROJECTS
$5,985,331 OF VHCB & LEVERAGED FUNDS



WATER QUALITY GRANTS

$702,377 ➡ $5.3MILLION

AWARDED TO 22 FARMS IN FY19 | **LEVERAGED (7.5:1)**

JONES FARM

CRAFTSBURY

JAMES & NICOLE JONES

James Jones and his daughter Nicole own and operate Jones Farm, a fourth generation dairy operating in Craftsbury since 1940. Recognized as a Ben & Jerry's Caring Dairy, stewardship and animal welfare have been priorities for the Jones family. Aspiring to improve the farm and surrounding landscape for future generations, they applied for a Water Quality Grant to upgrade the manure storage for their heifer barn. The project was awarded $39,469 from VHCB and received additional financial and technical support from the VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets' Best Management Practices Program and the Jones' local conservation district.

The new covered hoop house structure and concrete barnyard allows the farm to store manure until conditions are optimal for spreading, and has improved soil health, animal management and farm efficiency, while reducing runoff. James said, "It's more than just manure storage—the barnyard has improved our cow handling, which is much more efficient for us now. It's been a huge savings in labor and the covered hoop house has improved the quality of the manure."

"This project would not have been done if it weren't for VHCB's grants."

~ James Jones

Jones Farm hoop house manure storage structure and concrete barnyard, purchased with support from a $39,469 VHCB Water Quality Grant. Craftsbury, VT.

2019 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

FARM ENTERPRISES & VALUE-ADDED PRODUCERS

1. Agricola Farm, Panton*
2. Aurora Farms, Charlotte*
3. Bear Roots/Roots Farm Market, Middlesex*
4. Birch Meadow Farm, Fairlee*
5. Boneyard Farm, Bakersfield
6. Butterworks Farm, Westfield*
7. Carrier Farm, Williamstown
8. Cedar Circle Farm, Thetford*
9. Chandler Pond Farm, Wheelock*
10. Chaput Family Farms, Troy*
11. Chimney Point Farm, Addison*
12. Cream & Sugar Spread, Fairfield*
13. Drift Farmstead, Roxbury
14. Ekolott Farm, Newbury*
15. Field Stone Farm, Northfield
16. Flack Family Farm, Enosburg Falls
17. Free Verse Farm, Chelsea
18. Friends and Neighbors Organic Farm, Marshfield
19. Gods Country Farm, Holland*
20. Goldmont Farm, LLC, Franklin
21. Green Acres Farm, Randolph Center*
22. Green Mountain Hay, Charlotte*
23. Green Mountain Orchards, Putney
24. Hall and Breen Farm LLC, Orwell
25. Halls Orchard, Isle La Motte
26. Harlow Farm, Westminster*
27. Harris Family Farm, Bridport
28. Haystack Farmstead, Pawlet
29. Honey Field Farm, Norwich*
30. Ice House Farm, Goshen
31. Joneslan Farm, Hyde Park*
32. Karim Farm Creamery, Ryegate
33. Keep It Real Organics, Jamaica
34. Madison Dairy, Shoreham*
35. Maple Valley Farm, Bridgewater
36. Mead Farms, Newport*
37. Meeting Place Pastures, Cornwall*
38. Morningside Farm, Shoreham*
39. MoSe Farm, Orwell
40. Newlands Goat Dairy, Marshfield
41. Northwind Farm, Walden*
42. Parent Riverside Farm, Enosburg
43. Pinello Family Farm, Randolph*
44. Plew Farm, Mount Holly
45. Plouffe Family Farm, Bridport
46. Royal Terrace Farm, Royalton
47. Russell Farm, Starksboro
48. Shat – Acres, Greensboro Bend*
49. Snug Valley Farm, East Hardwick*
50. Spring Brook Farm, Westfield*
51. Spring-Rock Farm, Springfield
52. Stickney Farm, Putney*
53. Stony Pond Farm, Enosburg*
54. Stray Cat Flower Farm, Burlington*
55. Swallowdale Farm, Orwell*
56. Tinker Farm, East Fairfield
57. Top Rankin Farm, Johnson*
58. Vermont Willow Nursery, Fairfield
59. VT Dinners, Brattleboro
60. Wayward Goose Farm, Pawlet
61. Willis Towne Farm, Florence
62. Wilson Herb Farm, Greensboro*
63. Wood's VT Syrup LLC, Bethel

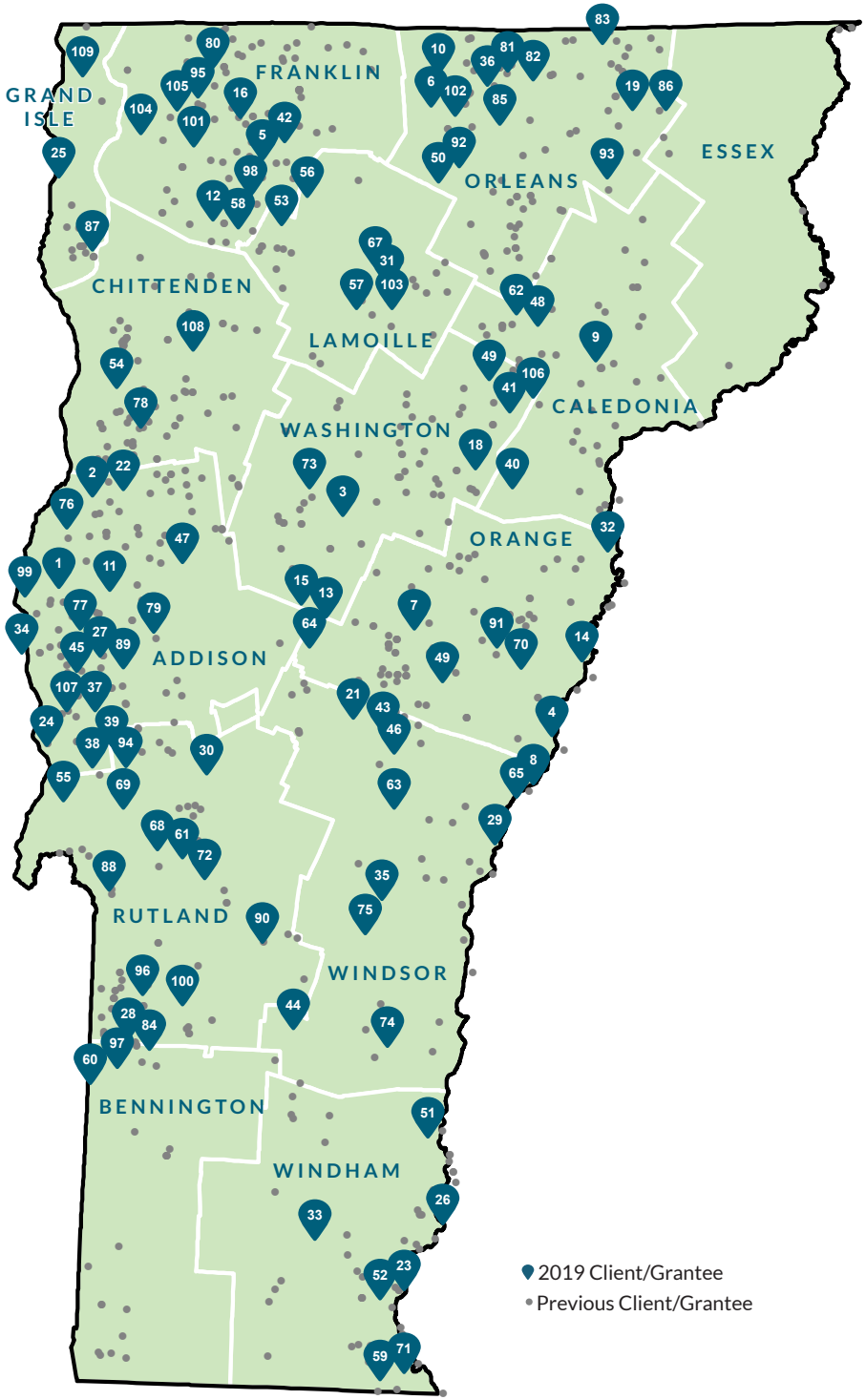
FOREST PRODUCTS ENTERPRISES

64. Third Branch Horse Logging, Braintree
65. McGovern Forestry & Land Management, East Thetford
66. Kirby Mulch, Concord
67. Rick's Firewood, Hyde Park
68. Sumner Forestry Management, Florence

FOREST LANDOWNERS

69. Abelson Family, Sudbury
70. Bingaman Family, Corinth*
71. Frehsee Family, Brattleboro
72. Gagnon Family, Pittsford
73. Gilpin Family, Waterbury
74. Lindberg Family, Cavendish*
75. Morse Family, Bridgewater

*Conserved property



2019 GRANTEES

WATER QUALITY GRANTEES

76. Allendale Farm, Panton*
$40,000 for equipment to manage manure

77. Blue Spruce Farm, Bridport*
$40,000 for a feed bunker runoff collection and containment system

78. Donegan Family Dairy, Charlotte*
$8,500 for a new manure pond

79. Foster Brothers Farm, Middlebury*
$40,000 for a no-till grain drill

80. HJ & A Howrigan and Sons, Inc., Sheldon*
$8,191 for a no-till planter

81. J&R Family Farm, N. Troy
$40,000 for manure management infrastructure improvements

82. JASA Family Farm, Newport & Coventry
$40,000 for a new manure pit

83. Judd Dairy, Derby*
$40,000 for manure management & barn infrastructure improvements

84. Ken Leach Farm, N. Rupert*
$40,000 for a new barn for young and dry cows that will improve manure management

85. Marquis Organic Dairy Farm, Newport Center*
$3,686 for materials needed to implement a new rotational grazing plan

86. New Venture Farm, Morgan*
$40,000 for a concrete barnyard to capture waste, reduce erosion, and provide animals outdoor access in winter

87. Pigasus Meats, S. Hero*
$40,000 for a composting winter hog production facility

88. Saltis Farm, Poultney
$38,500 for purchase of a round bale wrapper and silage baler to eliminate nutrient runoff

89. Severy Farm, Cornwall
$40,000 for improved cow facilities and manure storage infrastructure

90. Seward Farm, E. Wallingford
$40,000 for construction of a covered barnyard

91. Shire Beef, Vershire*
$11,500 for a woodchip barnyard

92. Spring Brook Farm, Westfield*
$40,000 for new manure storage capacity

93. The Farm at Wheeler Mountain, Westmore*
$22,000 for manure management infrastructure

94. Tupper Farm, Orwell & Sudbury
$30,000 for exclusion fencing, barnyard and manure management improvements

95. Vosburg Farm, Swanton*
$40,000 for new manure storage infrastructure to eliminate groundwater contamination

96. Walnut Hill Farm, Pawlet*
$20,000 for manure management equipment and barn drainage improvements

97. Woodlawn Holsteins, Pawlet*
$40,000 for infrastructure related to transitioning to more grass-based production

DAIRY IMPROVEMENT GRANTEES

98. B&T Black Creek Farms, LTD, Fairfield
$40,000 to install a cow identification system

99. Chimney Point Farm LP, Addison*
$40,000 to purchase a multi-crop no-till seeder equipped with GPS

100. Fisk-Haines Farm LLC, Danby
$40,000 to purchase a silage bagger and decommission a haylage bunk

101. HJ & A Howrigan and Sons, Inc., Sheldon*
$31,810 to purchase a no-till drill

102. J&R Family Farm, LLC, North Troy
$40,000 to help build a new heifer barn

103. Lanphear Farm, Hyde Park
$40,000 to purchase a cow activity monitoring system

104. Magnan Bros. Maquam Shore Dairy, St. Albans*
$40,000 to install a cow identification system and to purchase automatic take-offs

105. Manning Dairy LLC, St. Albans*
$33,684 for bulk tank upgrades

106. Molly Brook Farm, Danville*
$40,000 for milk house renovations

107. Morningside Farm, Shoreham*
$10,000 to build a micro-dairy processing facility

108. North Williston Cattle Company, Williston*
$16,450 to purchase a no-till cover crop drill

109. Sunset Lake Farm LLC #2, Alburgh*
$39,000 to purchase a no-till grain drill

**Conserved Property*

CAPACITY BUILDING & CONNECTION:
STRENGTHENING RURAL COMMUNITIES

In FY19, the Viability Program expanded work in communities across the state by engaging in network development and capacity building. Initiatives included: facilitating greater collaboration among food hubs; providing capacity support and professional development across our service provider network in Vermont; coordinating the National Farm Viability Conference; and assisting small Vermont communities with federal grant applications.

FOOD HUB COLLABORATIVE

VHCB has supported the development of the Vermont Food Hub Collaborative, assisting the hubs with enhancing partnerships and information-sharing as well as securing funding. The Collaborative includes five Vermont food hubs seeking to collectively increase sales of local farm and food products in Vermont and regional markets: The VT Food Venture Center at the Center for an Agricultural Economy (Hardwick); Food Connects (Brattleboro); Green Mountain Farm Direct (Newport); Intervale Food Hub (Burlington); and Mad River Food Hub (Waitsfield). In 2018, these five food hubs aggregated and distributed a combined $2.2M in products on behalf of over 200 Vermont farm and food businesses. In the past year, the Collaborative worked with a consultant to identify opportunities for increased inter-food hub collaboration such as exchanging products to meet local demand. As this network develops, hubs will help the local producers they serve access broader markets within and outside of Vermont.

5 FOOD HUBS
WORKING WITH OVER
200
VERMONT FARM AND FOOD BUSINESSES
AGGREGATED & DISTRIBUTED
$2.2M
IN PRODUCT

SCALING THE IMPACT OF FARM VIABILITY SERVICES:
DEVELOPING A NORTHEAST PEER ALLIANCE

The Viability Program is partnering with other regional leaders to strengthen and expand farm viability services, providing guidance based on our model which has succeeded in Vermont for the last 17 years. In August 2019, the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) awarded the Viability Program $624,060 to advance the agricultural economy by establishing an agricultural business assistance alliance across VT, NY, NH, and ME. With the goal of supporting the long-term viability of farm and food businesses, this initiative is engaging more than 50 organizations in developing an association of business assistance programs and professionals in the Northeast. Coordinated activities and programming will launch across the network in 2020 to expand the capacity of service providers in New England and New York's Hudson Valley. These initiatives aim to close gaps in technical assistance across the region, supporting a future of vibrant working lands economies.

LEARNING TOGETHER:
THE NATIONAL FARM VIABILITY CONFERENCE

Responding to a need identified in the agricultural services community to connect with colleagues and share knowledge and best practices, the Viability Program launched the National Farm Viability Conference in 2008. The conference, which now occurs every two years, brings together agricultural business advisors and other professionals to learn from each other, improve their skills, and support farm viability and resilient food systems across the nation. The Viability Program has continued to support this conference in partnership with new hosts, and in 2019 the conference was held in Red Wing, Minnesota by Renewing the Countryside. The event drew more than 300 attendees from 32 states, Puerto Rico, and Canada for three days of workshops, tours, and facilitated discussions designed to foster partnerships, enhance skills, and provide practical resources.

"Being new to this work, it was so helpful to have so many people providing direct services to farmers around the country in one place. The workshops were good, informative, and challenging."

~2019 Conference Attendee

"The conference was a blast and we're still processing how many possible collaborations may come out of the connections we made."

~ Laura Barley, American Farmland Trust

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (REDI)

Many small towns and businesses in rural Vermont have committed to making their communities more vibrant places to live, work, and play – coming together to vision and strategize methods to reach their goals. However, limited access to funding resulting from lack of staff time, fundraising skills, or knowledge of resources available remains a barrier to economic development. 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 to support communities in developing more successful grant proposals.

With $150,000 of State funds over two years, REDI has resulted in $2,342,445 in grants to small communities and businesses, a 15:1 return on investment. Since its inception, REDI has brought in an average of $146,400 per project to towns across the state.

$150,000 IN REDI FUNDS ➡ **$2,342,445** IN GRANTS FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES

In the second year of the program, REDI supported 13 communities in strategic fundraising efforts to carry out critical projects for their towns and businesses. Six of the projects have been awarded a total of $566,194 in grants, leveraging an additional $425,000 in match funding. Applications are in process for three additional projects seeking $2.5M: Wastewater expansion in Jeffersonville, outdoor recreation infrastructure in East Charleston, and artisanal meat processing in Panton. REDI also assisted the Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) and the town of Chelsea with feasibility studies that will guide and enhance future funding applications.

Priority areas for REDI include dairy processing, value-added food, phosphorus removal, composting, outdoor recreation, and downtown revitalization. Funding is targeted to small communities of 5,000 people or less.

2019 RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE - FUNDED PROJECTS

Community Center in Bridgewater:
The Bridgewater Area Community Foundation received a $30,000 Vermont Community Development Program grant to redevelop a retired school building into a community center with childcare and space for local businesses.

Trails in Newport:
The Memphremagog Ski Touring Association received $23,194 from the Recreational Trails Program to expand high quality trails for biking, hiking, and skiing in Newport, enhancing connectivity to the downtown.

Public Space in Poultney:
The Town of Poultney received a $104,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund award to build a public park that will host arts and cultural events, preserving green space and contributing to the vibrancy of Poultney's downtown.

Wood Processing in Kirby:
The Kirby Mulch Company received a $130,000 Working Lands Grant to build out the infrastructure for a new wood processing business that will utilize local wood, supporting the Northeast Kingdom's forest economy.

Marketing Outdoor Recreation in the NEK:
The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative, in partnership with local municipalities, received a $250,000 Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) grant to support marketing the region as a trail-based destination through improved mapping, links to businesses, multi-town connections, and new infrastructure.

Broadband in Readsboro:
The town of Readsboro received a $29,000 USDA-Rural Business Development Grant to support the creation of a business plan for broadband expansion, a critical tool for community and economic development.

BRIDGEWATER AREA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

BRIDGEWATER

BRIDGEWATER COMMUNITY CENTER PROJECT

The historic Bridgewater Village School, operating since 1914, closed its doors in 2015. The community came together to preserve and renovate the school, creating the non-profit Bridgewater Area Community Foundation to purchase the building. With goals to create a central hub for all ages and abilities, the town's first licensed childcare center, and space for local enterprises, they utilized REDI to secure a $30,000 Community Development Block Grant to help bring this vision to reality. The non-profit will continue to develop additional grant applications with REDI support. Early fundraising success has propelled this project forward and the new childcare facility is expected to open in 2020.

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

~ Hank Smith, Bridgewater Area Community Foundation

TOWN OF POULTNEY

POULTNEY

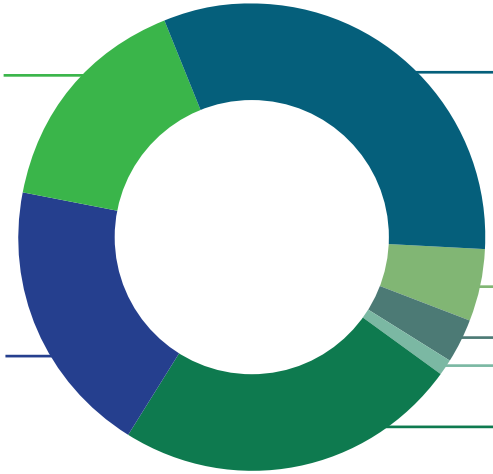
SLATE QUARRY PARK PROJECT

The Slate Quarry Park brings to life a community priority: creating Poultney's first public park on Main Street's only remaining green space. Grant support through REDI secured $104,000 from the Land & Water Conservation Fund to build the park, which will honor the community's 180-year history of slate production and be a site for community events. The park will be an important component of downtown revitalization, featuring programming for Poultney residents, creating a destination for visitors, and boosting the local economy.

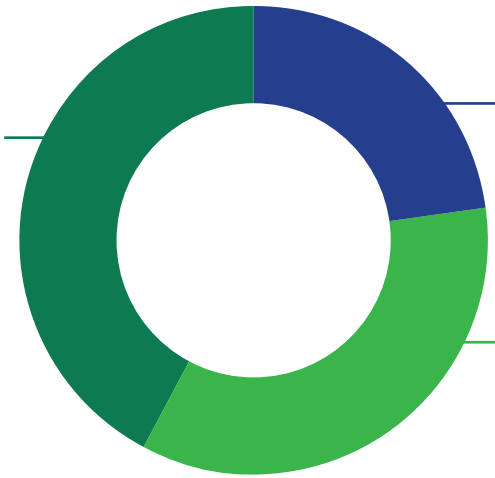
VIABILITY PROGRAM FUNDS DISBURSED FY19

In FY19 the Viability Program expended $2.47 million, nearly half coming from federal and private funding sources.

SOURCES
$2,471,291



USES
$2,471,291



The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program's core funding is provided by the State of Vermont through the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. In FY19 the Viability Program also received funding from USDA Rural Development, VT Working Lands Enterprise Board, Northern Border Regional Commission, USDA Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program, Vermont Community Foundation, High Meadows Fund, and Commonwealth Dairy.

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

VERMONT FARM & FOREST VIABILITY PROGRAM ADVISORY BOARD

Alyson Eastman (Chair)
Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

Bob Baird, Baird Farm

Abbie Corse, The Corse Farm Dairy

Joan Goldstein, Vermont Department of Economic Development

Colleen Goodridge, Goodridge Lumber

Adam Grinold, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation

Sarah Isham, Vermont Agricultural Credit Corporation (VEDA)

Pete Johnson, Pete's Greens

Chuck Ross, University of Vermont Extension

Gustave Seelig, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Michael Snyder Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation

VERMONT FARM & FOREST VIABILITY PROGRAM STAFF

Ela Chapin, Program Director

Liz Gleason, Program Manager

Katie Michels, Program Coordinator

Mariah Noth, Outreach & Communications Coordinator

VISIT US ONLINE: VHCB.ORG/VIABILITY

PHOTO CREDITS:
Page 6: Micah LeMasters, Pauline Stevens
Pages 16, 17, 20: Pauline Stevens
Back cover: Clockwise: Ben DeFlorio, Haven Tate, VHCB, Pauline Stevens

"The farm has been in the family for almost 200 years which is remarkable. We have benefited so greatly from the support we have received from the Viability Program, and most likely would not be farming if not for that support."

~Myles & Rhonda Goodrich, Molly Brook Farm

"Just gaining a financial picture of our company was so incredibly useful for us. It's hard to overstate how big that piece was and how grateful we are for the help we received in working on our financial components. Of course the accountability piece was great too, but the business planning element really helped us take things to the next level."

~ Catherine Emil, Towards Nightfall

"This program has helped our business thrive. It has filled the few missing links we had. Incredible program. I am so proud to live and work in this state."

~ Heidi Choate, Small Axe Farm

58 East State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

802-828-1098
vhcb.org/viability