



Vermont Housing &  
Conservation Board

VERMONT FARM & FOREST  
VIABILITY PROGRAM

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



# A LETTER TO LEGISLATORS

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

Vermont's working lands economy has weathered extraordinary changes this year. In the face of the ongoing pandemic, climate change, and unstable markets, our farm and forest businesses have adapted quickly and skillfully, providing for their communities while continuing to drive our economy.

The challenges of 2020 and 2021 have also underscored that business support services are essential tools to increase the resiliency of our working landscape. With the support of additional state and federal funds, the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program has grown and adapted to provide coaching to 550 working lands businesses impacted by the pandemic. Simultaneously, we served 122 businesses in our holistic business planning program, helping them to create forward-thinking plans that focus on adaptation and long-term viability. We have collaborated closely with VHC's conservation program, putting systems in place to make farmland affordable and accessible to beginning farmers.

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program has also continued to invest in rural economic development and a vibrant working landscape through other state-funded initiatives: our Water Quality Grants program, which supported 22 new projects to improve agricultural water quality, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative, which helped 20 rural communities and secured \$1.95 million in grant funding for critical community development projects.

We thank you for your support in strengthening our communities and working landscape.

Sincerely,



**Executive Director Gustave Seelig**  
Vermont Housing & Conservation Board



**Secretary Anson Tebbetts**  
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets



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





Viability Program staff and service providers (2021)

## OUR MISSION:

“To enhance the economic viability of Vermont farm, food, and forest products enterprises.”

## OUR NETWORK OF SERVICE PROVIDERS:



# OUR IMPACT

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, a program of the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), works to advance Vermont's working lands economy by helping farm and forest producers improve their businesses. Since 2003, the program has grown to lead a variety of initiatives that further VHCB's mission to "maintain for the benefit of future generations the essential characteristics of the Vermont countryside," complementing investments in housing, conservation, and historic preservation that enhance quality of life across Vermont.

## WORKING LANDS BUSINESS ADVISING

- 122 farm, food, and forestry enterprises received business coaching to develop business and transfer plans, increasing skills in financial analysis and strategic planning
- 71% of clients reported increased gross sales; net income increased by \$56,000 on average

## EXPANDING REGIONAL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

- Increasing assistance available to regional producers through the Agricultural Viability Alliance (AVA), an association of business assistance providers in New England and the Hudson Valley region of New York with funding from the Northern Border Regional Commission

## STRENGTHENING VERMONT'S FOOD HUB NETWORK

- Facilitating collaboration among Vermont food hubs and the development of a collective Vermont brand, securing more than \$400,000 for the food hubs to expand markets for Vermont producers



## COVID RESPONSE & RECOVERY

- 556 working lands entrepreneurs received coaching to help navigate pandemic impacts
- 83% of businesses were assisted in applying for relief programs

## WATER QUALITY GRANTS

- 22 grants, totaling more than \$820,000 and leveraging an additional \$5.68M, awarded to farms for infrastructure improvements and innovative technologies to advance clean water goals

## RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

- \$100,000 in REDI funds provided capacity to 20 small communities to apply for grants, resulting in \$1.95M for 11 projects

## FOREST HEALTH & CONNECTIVITY

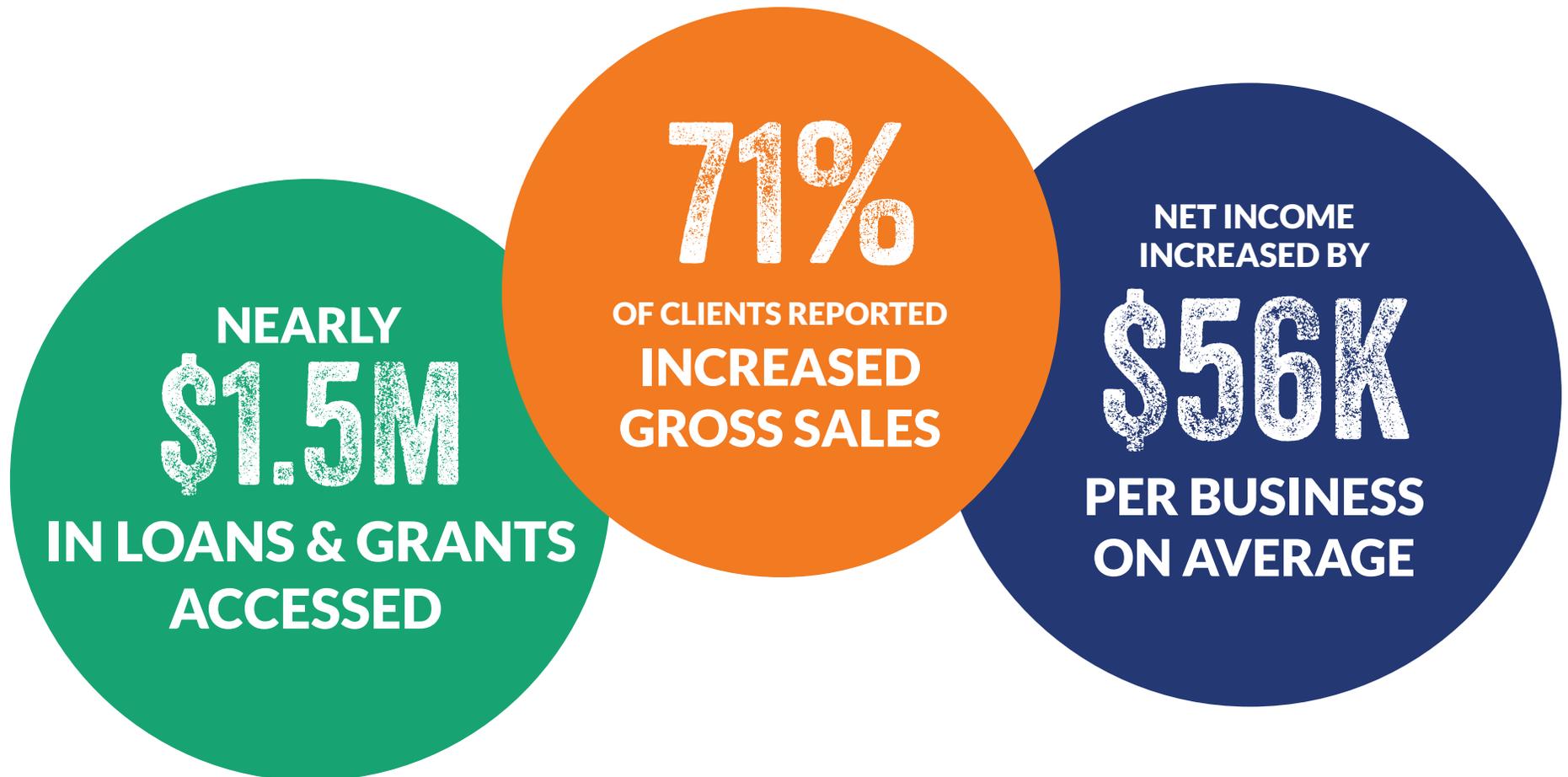
- In-depth succession planning services to forest landowners to reduce or prevent forest fragmentation



## WORKING LANDS BUSINESS ADVISING

In Fiscal Year 2021, 122 farm, food, and forest enterprises received business advising services (see p.14 for a map of FY21 graduates). Entrepreneurs enrolled in the Viability Program worked with business advisors to develop business and transition plans, access capital, improve financial management and marketing skills, and increase the quality and efficiency of their production. Since 2003, the Viability Program has assisted more than 850 working lands businesses with business and transition planning, working closely with VHCB's Conservation Program to help beginning farmers access affordable farmland and assist established farms with successfully transitioning to new ownership or new enterprises.

During the last year, Vermont producers have navigated a global pandemic, supply chain disruptions, concerns for employee health and safety, the loss of a significant buyer for organic milk, as well as the persistent challenges of increasing production costs and volatile markets. Individualized, holistic advising through the Viability Program has helped strengthen working lands businesses despite these challenges, as clients reported significant increases in satisfaction—with their operations, in their ability to generate income, and in achieving work-life balance. These clients generate a significant economic footprint, providing an estimated 455 jobs (FTEs) and realizing more than \$33M in annual gross sales.



“This was our first time writing a business plan – it was always something Tony had in his head, but not something we’d put down on paper. Even with our combined experience in the industry, there’s always something to learn. Working with Chris to create a plan was extremely helpful and opened us up to so many resources, including the Working Lands Grant.”

– Brittnee Dwyer, Dwyer Logging & Firewood



## DWYER LOGGING & FIREWOOD

ST. JOHNSBURY

TONY & BRITTNEE DWYER

Tony and Brittnee Dwyer are both fourth generation forest entrepreneurs. Together they operate a logging and firewood business that has grown from a one-person operation to eight employees. With the rapid growth of their business, and high demand for kiln-dried firewood, they recognized a need to invest in a new kiln to increase efficiency. Working with their business advisor, Chris Lindgren at UVM Extension, they were able to put their goals and financials on paper and develop a business plan to support the investment. The business plan was critical to their successful application for a \$75,000 Working Lands Grant and will allow them to expand production.

“We needed help figuring out the best path to take our business to achieve our goal of financial sustainability. We have no shortage of ideas of where we want our business to go, but it’s been critical to have the help of mentors and advisors to assist us in figuring out where our time, energy, and resources are best spent.”

– Matt Systo & Kim Rich, Old Soul Farm



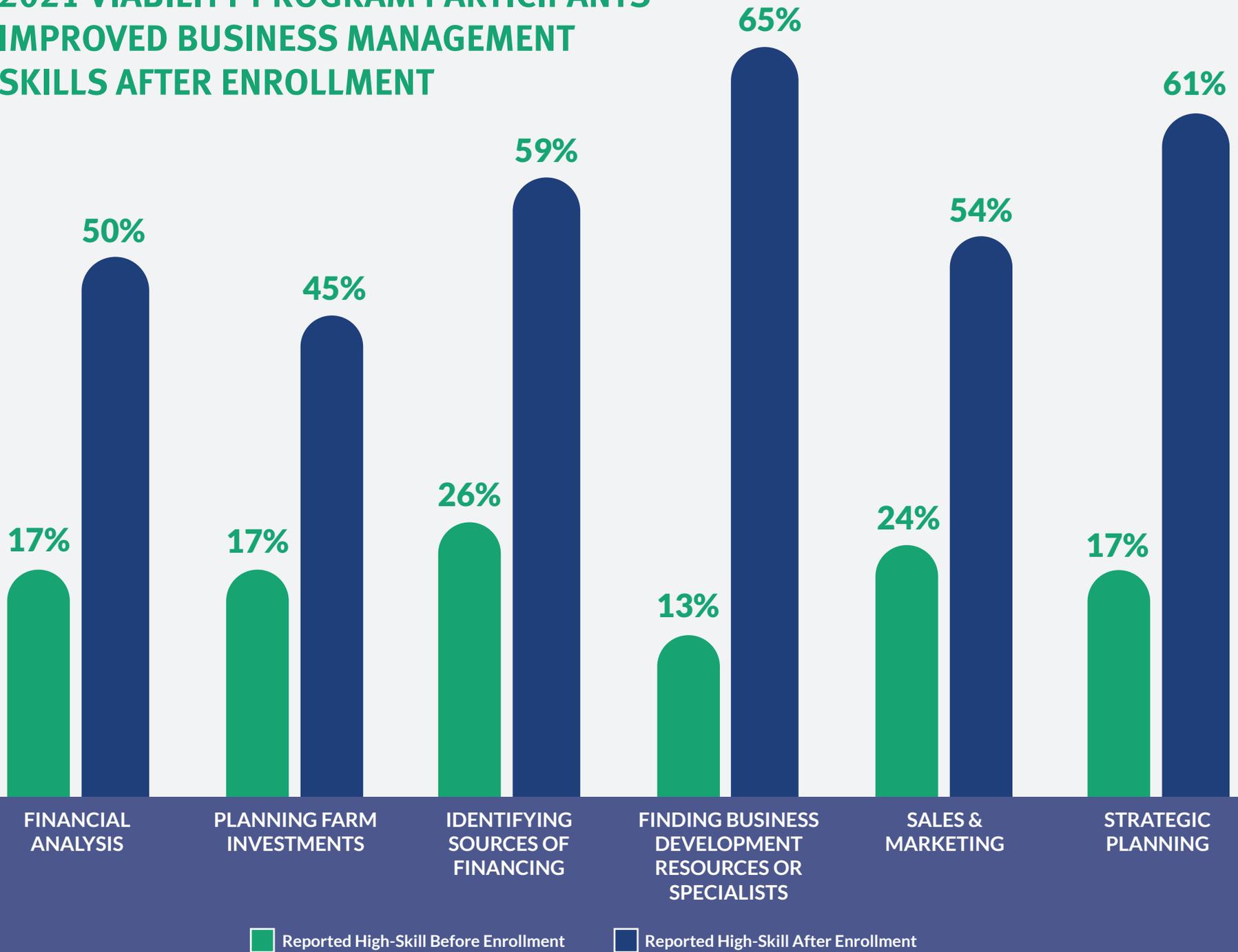
## OLD SOUL FARM

BARRE

MATT SYSTO & KIM RICH

After graduating from the UVM Farmer Training Program together in 2014, Matt Systo and Kim Rich decided to launch their business, Old Soul Farm, in the hills of Matt’s hometown of Barre. They’ve slowly grown their low-input, regenerative farm and diversified market garden with the goal of creating an edible landscape that can support their community and their livelihoods. Even with a clear vision, accessing farmland is one of the greatest barriers for new farmers. Matt and Kim worked with Viability Program advisor Sam Smith at the Intervale Center to create a business plan and navigate the eventual land purchase. With support from VHC’s Conservation Program and Vermont Land Trust, Matt and Kim will be able to purchase the land affordably through the sale of a conservation easement. With planning support and a secure land base, these farmers are growing their business to a scale that can support both of them farming full-time.

## 2021 VIABILITY PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS IMPROVED BUSINESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS AFTER ENROLLMENT



“When our advisors helped us put everything into a spreadsheet, it was like night and day and I knew exactly what was needed for the organic certification. It was a blessing that I had them to keep me organized, to point me where I needed to get my information, and to know that I could do it.”

—Theresa Fortin, God’s Country Farm

“Working on planning with Chris was a learning experience. His approach kept me focused and helped me put my goals in perspective. One of the biggest challenges we’re facing in the forest industry is climate change—having a plan, and being able to be nimble as a business, has been a big part of our success.”

— Jon Parker, Brookside Timber Harvesting

“Completing a business plan helped us be sure that the transition to a goat dairy would make sense financially and be a viable option. It was certainly worth it to know what to expect and get number projections to help us know how to succeed. Now that we have a business plan, we can look back on it to know what’s worked and what to change for the next year.”

— Steve Jones, Joneslan Farm



## GOD’S COUNTRY FARM

HOLLAND

**THERESA & ADRIAN FORTIN**

The Fortin family has owned and operated God’s Country Farm since 1922. The conserved dairy sits on 435 acres where Adrian Fortin now milks 110 cows and tends the sugarbush. Adrian and his parents, Theresa and the late Ed Fortin, knew that planning for a farm transfer and maintaining their organic market would be a significant challenge to complete on a timeline that would work for their family. To help with this complex process, the Fortins worked with Viability Program advisors Jen Miller at NOFA-VT and Sarah Flack to plan for the farm transition, organize financials, and document their organic practices.

## BROOKSIDE TIMBER HARVESTING

WESTMINSTER

**JON PARKER**

Over the last 25 years, Jon Parker’s Westminster logging operation has grown and diversified to include forest management services and invasive plant control. Jon reports that working with business advisor Chris Lindgren at UVM Extension, “has helped me improve my marketing and understand how to be efficient with my time.” Jon has taken these lessons into the newest phase of his business, which is “more adaptable to climate change and shifts in the economy.”

## JONESLAN FARM

HYDE PARK

**STEVE & BRIAN JONES**

Steve and Brian Jones are the fifth generation on their conserved dairy in Hyde Park. Given fluctuating conventional milk prices and intensive labor needed to maintain their operation, the brothers began to consider transitioning to a goat operation, hoping to reduce expenses and improve work-life balance. When they decided to make this significant pivot, the brothers enrolled in the Viability Program, working with advisors Betsy Miller and Zac Smith at UVM Extension to complete a business plan. They used the plan to successfully apply for a \$150,000 Working Lands Grant for a new milking parlor, their biggest transition expense.

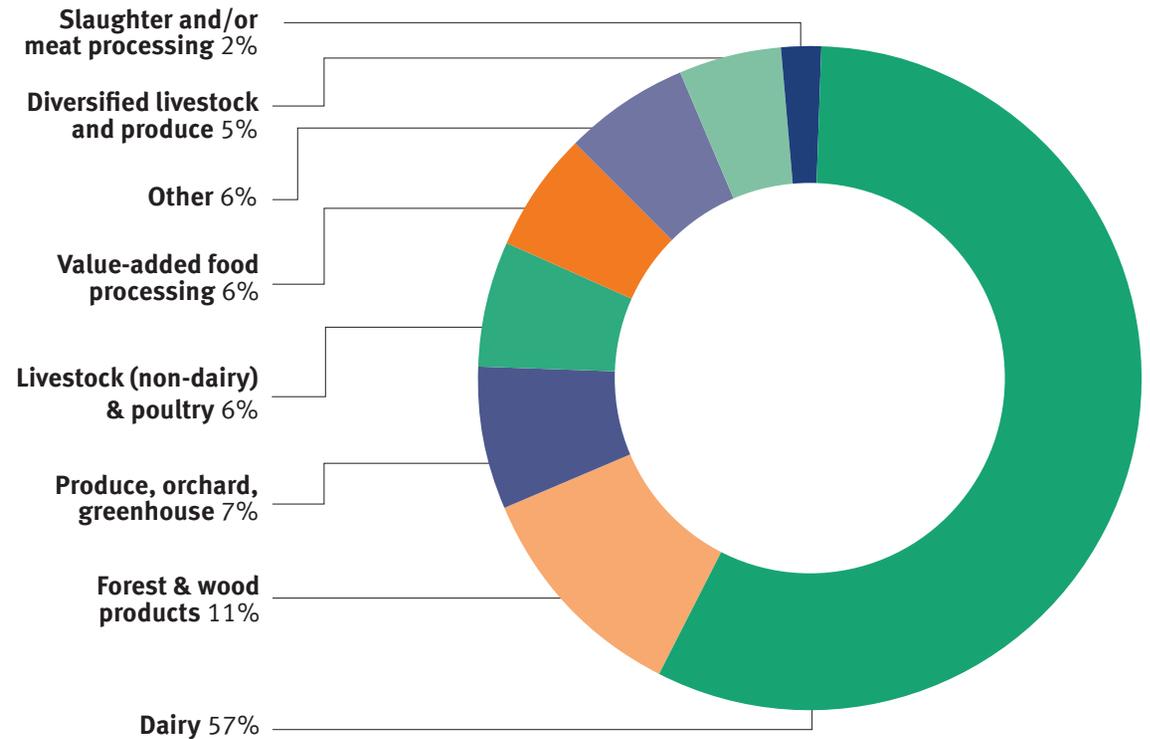
## COVID RESPONSE & RECOVERY COACHING:

In response to the extreme impacts of COVID-19 on producers, the Viability Program launched an additional advising program to provide nimble support to working lands businesses navigating pandemic challenges. Our COVID Response & Recovery Coaching program helped address issues ranging from dramatic sales swings and loss of markets to extraordinary demand for local foods and the need for new systems and procedures to ensure health and safety.

**Since March 2020, the program has supported more than 550 entrepreneurs who steward an estimated 178,000 acres, gross \$315M in annual revenues, and provide 2,275 full-time jobs.** Among clients served, nearly 400 producers were assisted with applying for the 2020 Vermont COVID Agricultural Assistance Program grants in collaboration with the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

Supported with an initial Working Lands Enterprise Initiative grant and sustained through federal CARES Act Funds, General Funds allocated by the State Legislature, and funding from Vermont Economic Development Authority, this program provides immediate support for crisis management and builds systems for long-term resiliency.

### BUSINESSES SERVED THROUGH COVID RESPONSE & RECOVERY COACHING



556

BUSINESSES SERVED

83%

WERE ASSISTED IN NAVIGATING RELIEF PROGRAMS

400

PRODUCERS SUPPORTED WITH ACCESSING VT COVID AGRICULTURAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM GRANTS

28%

SUPPORTED WITH FINANCIAL & CASH FLOW PLANNING

20%

SUPPORTED WITH SHIFTING MARKETS

## EVENING SONG FARM

CUTTINGSVILLE

KARA & RYAN FITZBEAUCHAMP

On their 4-acre organic produce farm in Cuttingsville, Kara and Ryan Fitzbeauchamp manage a four-season CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) enterprise with a focus on providing flexible, healthy food choices to their community. As supply chains broke down, demand for Evening Song’s produce spiked. Kara and Ryan were stretched thin trying to keep up with new safety processes, more orders than ever, and caring for their family. Relief funds were available to cover increased costs and additional labor, but navigating all of the options, eligibility, and documentation was daunting.

Their Viability Program advisor, Jen Miller at NOFA-VT, reached out to support them with applying for assistance. With Jen’s help identifying resources and developing financial documents, the Fitzbeauchamps secured funding to support a new team member who was crucial to continuing operations.

“Our limiting factor was time. Jen was instrumental in encouraging us to apply for resources we needed to secure an incredible employee we desperately needed, but would’ve never been able to hire without the funding. Jen continues to be a rock star at understanding exactly how to help and then providing effective support.”

– Kara Fitzbeauchamp, Evening Song Farm



## WATER QUALITY GRANTS

VHCB’s Water Quality Grants Program helps farmers make capital improvements that positively impact water quality and support the long-term viability of agricultural enterprises.

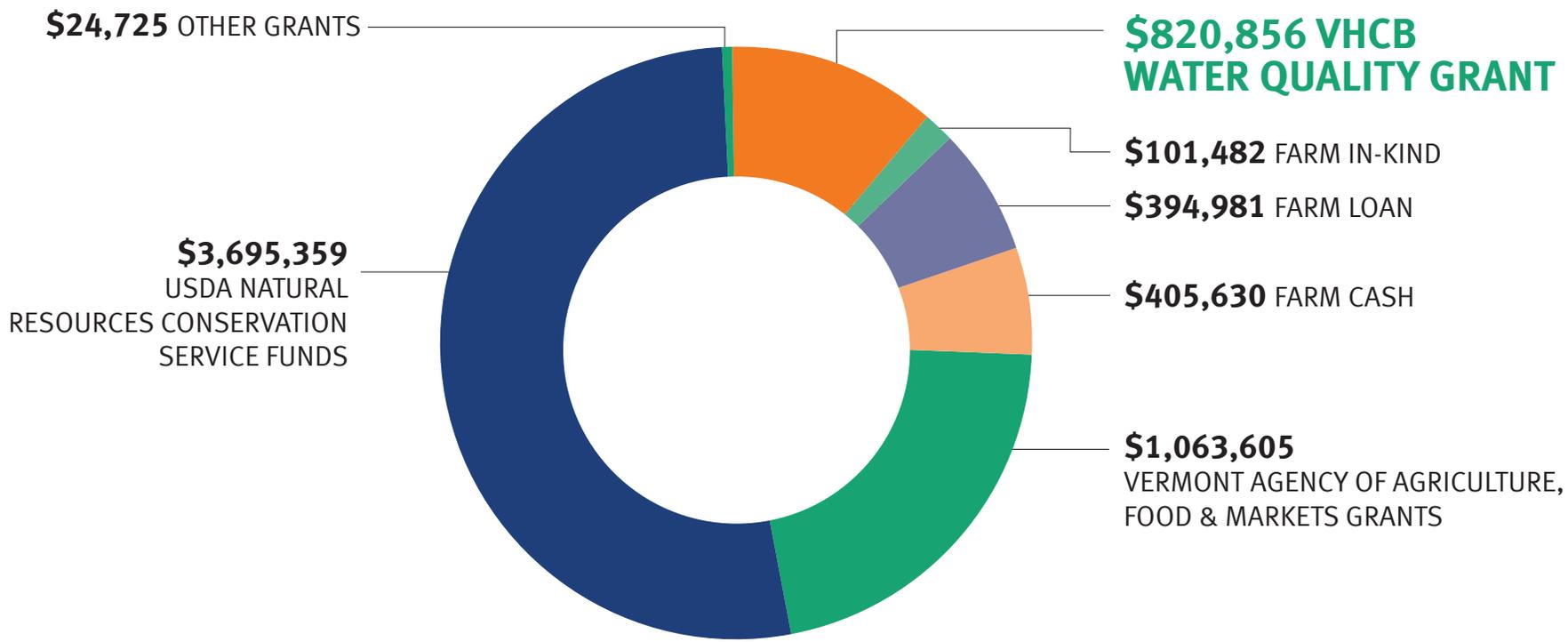
In Fiscal Year 2021, the Viability Program awarded \$820,856 in water quality grants to 22 farms, leveraging more than \$5.68 M in additional funds (a ratio of 7:1), to help farmers and the state meet clean water goals. Grantees are located across the state in the Lake Champlain, Lake Memphremagog, St. Francois River, and Connecticut River watersheds. Funding for these awards comes from the State of Vermont’s Capital Construction and Bonding Act.

Outcomes of this program include improved compliance with the Required Agricultural Practices, soil health, environmental stewardship, labor efficiency, and animal welfare. Grantees represent a range of farms: dairy and livestock, small and large, organic and conventional. Since 2017, VHCB’s Viability Program has awarded more than \$3.3M in Water Quality Grants. (FY21 grantees on p.14)

VHCB Water Quality grants complement federal and state investments from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Vermont Agency of Agriculture. Grants can support farmers in paying for projects that state and federal grant programs cannot cover, or help farmers meet required match for these programs, including the Vermont Agency of Agriculture’s Best Management Practices Program and the Capital Equipment Assistance Program.

## FUNDING SOURCES FOR FY21 WATER QUALITY PROJECTS

\$6,506,637 OF VHCB & LEVERAGED FUNDS



## SPRAGUE RANCH

BROOKFIELD

KEITH AND CHELSEA SPRAGUE

Keith and Chelsea Sprague own Sprague Ranch, a dairy that has been in Keith's family since 1864. To keep up with their growth and to address water quality concerns, the Spragues applied for a VHC Water Quality Grant to build a new calf hutch enclosure. Awarded \$40,000, they were able to build a roof over the calf housing, preventing manure runoff from entering the White River while keeping the calves and workers more comfortable in all seasons. The Spragues engaged the community in the project, hosting "Art on the Farm," an event with live music, art vendors, and the unveiling of a World Cow mural on the new building. They've also recently enrolled in the Viability Program to work with an advisor on the early stages of transition planning.

“We're so happy we did this project. The new enclosure captures any runoff we would have had, and the cows are so fragile when they are little, so it helps them stay warm and dry. It's just worked out on so many levels – water quality, cow health, and engaging with the community. These assistance programs are a huge help for farmers trying to stay viable.”

– Chelsea Sprague, Sprague Ranch

## HILLSIDE HOMESTEAD

ALBANY

RENEE AND CHET BAKER

Renee and Chet Baker own and operate a first-generation dairy farm, providing milk to the award-winning Jasper Hill Creamery. With a \$35,359 VHC Water Quality Grant they were able to build a new concrete manure stacking pad. They are also currently working on business planning with their advisor, Daniel Keeney at the Center for an Agricultural Economy.

“The new stacking pad has made our lives easier, and even though it was needed, there's no way we could've financed it on our own. Day-to-day chores like moving feed and cleaning the barn have been much easier, and water quality-wise, manure is staying where it's supposed to be. Our goal is to keep the water as clean as possible because if you take care of the water, it takes care of you in the long run. It all goes together.”

– Renee Baker, Hillside Homestead



## VIABILITY PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

1. **Aires Hill Farm**, Berkshire\*
2. **Aurora Farm**, Charlotte\*
3. **Better Wheel Workshops, LLC**, Newfane
4. **Birch Meadow Farm**, Fairlee\*
5. **Blissful Dairy**, Bridport\*
6. **Blue Heron Farm**, Grand Isle\*
7. **Boston Post Dairy**, Enosburg Falls
8. **Brault's Market, LLC**, Troy
9. **Brookside Timber Harvesting**, Westminster
10. **C&K Butler Beef, LLC**, Bristol
11. **Cedar Circle Farm**, Thetford\*
12. **Chandler Hill Farm**, Peacham
13. **Chandler Pond Farm**, Wheelock\*
14. **Cobble Hill Meats & More**, Bridport/New Haven
15. **Common Roots**, South Burlington
16. **Corey Farm**, Franklin
17. **Crazy 8 Farm**, Newport\*
18. **Davis Farm**, Jericho
19. **Dream Lake Farm**, Fairfield
20. **Drift Farmstead**, Roxbury
21. **Dwyer Logging**, St. Johnsbury
22. **Earth Beat Seeds**, Worcester
23. **Ekolott Farm**, Newbury\*
24. **Fairmont Farm LLC**, East Montpelier\*
25. **Flack Family Farm**, Enosburg Falls
26. **Fort Waite Farm**, Corinth
27. **Fournier Farm, Inc.**, West Swanton\*
28. **Free Verse Farm**, Chelsea
29. **Friends & Neighbors Farm**, Marshfield
30. **Gilead Brook Farm**, Randolph
31. **Gingue Farm**, St. Johnsbury
32. **God's Country Farm**, Holland\*
33. **Goose City Berry Farm**, East Dover
34. **Green Mountain Orchards**, Brattleboro
35. **Hard Climb Farm**, Newport Center
36. **Healthy Roots Collaborative**, St. Albans City
37. **Hillside Homestead**, Albany\*
38. **Holyoke Dairy**, St. Albans\*
39. **Honey Field Farm**, Norwich\*
40. **Ice House Farm**, Goshen
41. **Jillian Holsteins**, Shoreham
42. **Joneslan Farm LLC**, Hyde Park\*
43. **Keep it Real Organics**, Jamaica
44. **Leather Farm**, Barnet
45. **LePage Farm**, Barre Town
46. **Lewis Creek Farm**, Starksboro
47. **Luce Farm**, Stockbridge
48. **Mark & Kerry's Farm**, Wheelock
49. **Madison Farm**, Shoreham\*
50. **Mahaffy Farm**, Corinth
51. **Maple Valley Farm**, Bridgewater
52. **Messier Farm**, Randolph\*
53. **Molly Brook Farm**, Danville\*
54. **Naga Bakehouse**, Middletown Springs
55. **NEK Grains**, St. Johnsbury
56. **Old Road Farm**, Granville\*
57. **Old Soul Farm**, Barre\*
58. **Olivia's Croutons**, Brandon
59. **Otter Creek Custom Meat Processing**, Pantton
60. **Peterson's Quality Malts**, Charlotte
61. **Pinello Family Farms**, Randolph Center\*
62. **Plante Farm**, Morrisville
63. **Plew Farm**, Mount Holly
64. **Pothier Family Farm**, Newport Center\*
65. **Poulin & Daughters Farm**, Brookfield
66. **Powers Logging**, Sheffield
67. **Pumpkin Village Foods**, Enosburg Falls
68. **Randall Family Farm**, Newport\*
69. **Red Clover Cheese Company**, Norwich
70. **Rooney Farm**, Morrisville
71. **Sayre Fields Farm & Shrubby, LLC**, Hinesburg
72. **Silloway Maple**, Randolph\*
73. **Silver Springs Farm**, Manchester Center
74. **Sprague Ranch**, Brookfield
75. **Spring-Rock Farm & Vermont Wagyu**, Springfield
76. **Swallowdale Farm**, Orwell\*
77. **Sweet Fern Gardens**, Roxbury
78. **Sweet Pickins Farm**, Putney
79. **The Farm Between**, Jeffersonville
80. **Thibeault Farm**, Irasburg
81. **Third Branch Horse Logging**, Braintree
82. **Vermont Mountain Elderberry**, East Fairfield
83. **Vermont Willow Nursery**, Fairfield
84. **Wayward Goose**, Pawlet
85. **Wildstone Farm**, Pownal
86. **Wilson Farm and Market**, Greensboro\*
87. **Woods Vermont Syrup Co.**, Randolph
88. **Zion Growers**, St. Johnsbury

\* Indicates Conserved Property

# VIABILITY PROGRAM GRANTEES

**89. Bartlett Family Farm, Stannard**  
\$40,000 for a hoop barn and manure stack pad

**90. Belter Family Farm Partnership, South Burlington**  
\$37,416 for concrete manure storage system

**91. Birch Meadow Farm, Fairlee\***  
\$24,223 for a no-till corn planter

**92. BJ Family Farm, Westfield**  
\$40,000 for manure pit upgrades and stackpad

**93. Butterworks Farm, Westfield\***  
\$40,000 for bedded pack upgrades as part of comprehensive nutrient management plan

**94. Deer Flats Farm LLC, Pawlet\***  
\$40,000 for a leachate collection system

**95. Fort Waite Holsteins LLC, Corinth**  
\$25,000 for liquid manure application equipment

**96. Four Hills Farm Partnership, Bristol\***  
\$40,000 for a liquid manure dragline injection system

**97. Kayhart Brothers LLC, Addison**  
\$40,000 for a no-till grain drill

**98. Kelley-View Farm, Newport City**  
\$38,216 for precision yield monitoring & mapping equipment

**99. LePage's Rising Sun Farm, Newport City**  
\$30,657 for manure pit expansion and barnyard improvements

**100. M & L Dairy, Whiting**  
\$40,000 for a no-till corn planter

**101. Newmont Farm LLC, Bradford\***  
\$40,000 for a sand lane

**102. Pothier Family Farm, Newport Center\***  
\$40,000.00 for a new barnyard and manure pit

**103. Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District, Pawlet**  
\$40,000 for a small manure injector for the Mettowee Valley

**104. Rainville Brothers Dairy LLC, Enosburg**  
\$40,000 for a manure and feed hauling truck

**105. Robert P Parent & Son LLC, Sheldon**  
\$40,000 for lined manure pit and barnyard

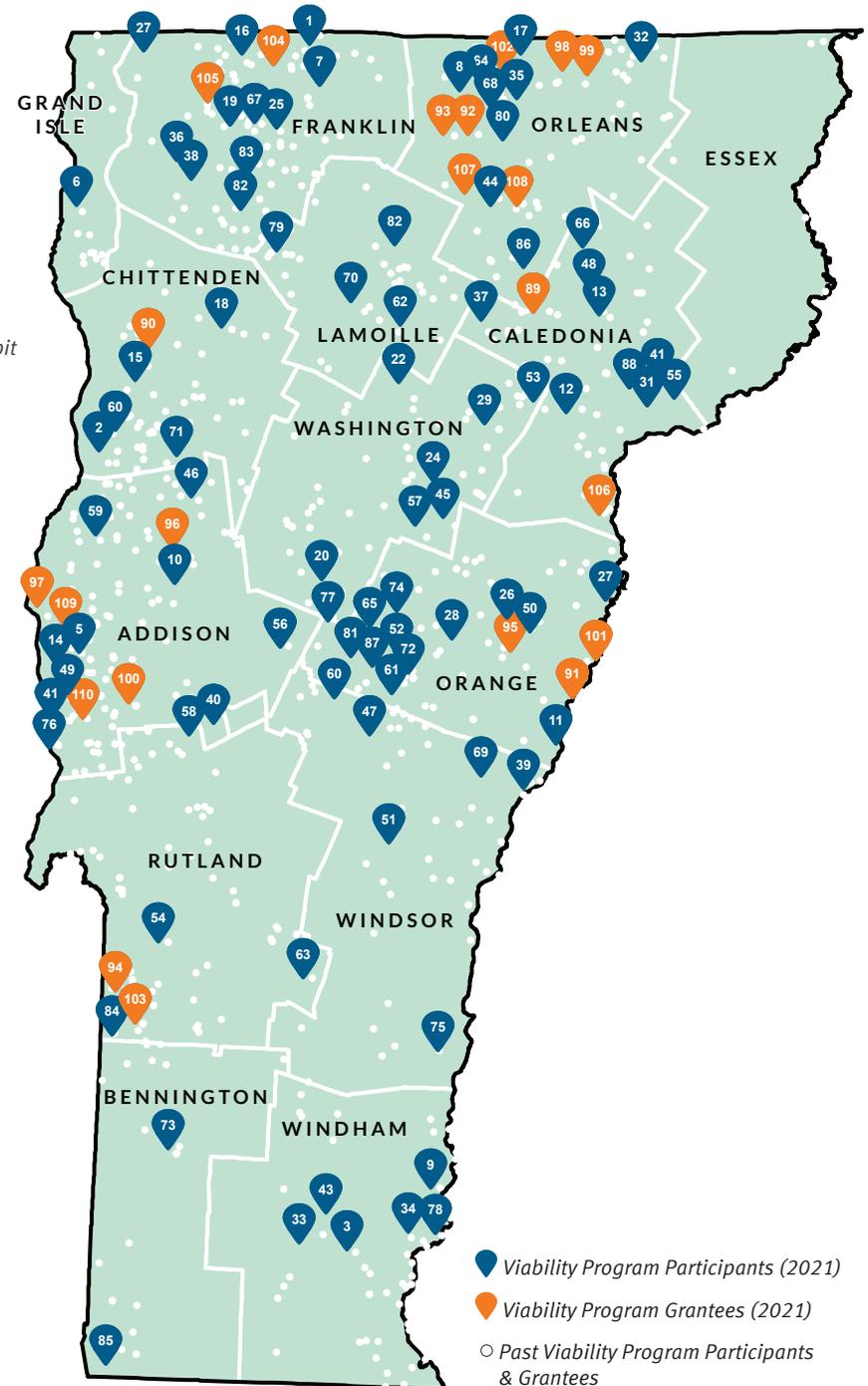
**106. Scotch Burn Farm, Rygate\***  
\$40,000 for a waste storage facility, pump, and pump station

**107. Sugar Plum Goat Dairy, Albany**  
\$30,343 for a bedded pack barn

**108. Sweet Rowen Farmstead, Glover\***  
\$40,000 for a concrete barnyard

**109. Vermont Heritage Grazers LLC, Bridport\***  
\$40,000 for covered manure storage, animal housing, gully erosion prevention

**110. Woodnotch Farm Inc., Shoreham\***  
\$35,000 for a no-till corn planter



## RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (REDI)

Across Vermont, engaged community members work together to plan and carry out projects that create vibrant places to live, work, and play. However, accessing funding for these projects remains a barrier for small communities due to lack of staff time, fundraising skills, and knowledge of resources.

The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), created by the Legislature in 2017, helps bridge this gap by assisting communities and businesses with accessing grants. Priorities for REDI include working lands sector development, outdoor recreation, and community revitalization. Funding is targeted to municipalities of 5,000 people or less.

In its fourth year, REDI supported 20 communities to advance critical projects for their towns and businesses. Thus far, 11 of these projects have been awarded more than \$1.95M in grants and applications for \$600,000 are pending. Since REDI's inception, 40 communities have successfully secured grants totaling nearly \$7M.



### NORTH CALAIS MEMORIAL HALL ASSOCIATION

#### NORTH CALAIS

Memorial Hall was built in 1886 in North Calais overlooking Mirror Lake. For well over one hundred years it served as a hub of social activity, hosting meetings, dances, celebrations, and other community functions. Over time, issues of structural integrity and accessibility became a barrier to activating the historic space. In 2017, the nonprofit North Calais Memorial Hall Association (NCMHA) was formed by local residents to bring the building back to life and preserve public access for future generations. NCMHA worked diligently to secure resources from donors, Preservation Trust of Vermont, the VT Division for Historic Preservation, the Calais Conservation Fund, and VHCB's Historic Preservation Program. Yet there was still a funding gap to move past the first phase of construction. With REDI support, NCMHA was able to work with a consultant to apply for a complex Northern Border Regional Commission SEID grant, securing a critical \$222,000 matching grant that will be paired with current fundraising efforts to bring the project to fruition.

“Gaining the professional expertise of a grant writer—someone who has the knowledge of how these types of applications are completed, viewed, and processed—is an enormous asset for a nonprofit such as NCMHA. The REDI assistance made this award happen, and this NBRC award happening means NCMHA is that much closer to opening the doors of Memorial Hall once again!”

— Mary Elder Jacobsen, NCMHA



## FY21 RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE: FUNDED PROJECTS

**Preserving a general store in East Calais:** The East Calais Community Trust (ECCT) formed to preserve the historic general store, operating in the heart of the village since the 1850s. With REDI support, ECCT secured \$185,000 for the store's restoration from the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC), VT Regional Economic Development Grant Program, and Village Center Tax Credit Program.

**Eco-certified apples in Shoreham:** Champlain Orchards will use a \$239,072 USDA VAPG award to expand demand for its pre-packaged, eco-certified apples in the greater New York City market through new packaging and a promotional campaign.

**Innovation in specialty meat in Springfield:** Vermont Wagyu, based at Spring-Rock Farm in Springfield, will utilize a \$250,000 USDA VAPG award to increase online sales of frozen cuts of prime Wagyu beef in emerging markets.

**Reinvigorating historic foodways in Hinesburg:** Shrubby will receive a \$250,000 VAPG grant to expand sales of its sparkling beverage made from aronia berries, based on an historic drink known as a "shrub."

**Health-focused farming in Derby:** Michele and Pierre Capron grew up on dairy farms in the Northeast Kingdom. Bringing their passions to the landscape, they started Lavender Essentials of Vermont. With a \$28,357 VAPG grant they will expand production and marketing for their aromatherapy and body care products made from farm-grown lavender.

**Expanding markets for Vermont wool in Vershire:** Flag Hill Farm will use an \$11,780 VAPG grant to increase the value of raw wool by transforming it into wool hat kits that can be widely distributed to support market expansion.

**Growing the supply of pasture-raised meat in Richmond:** A \$250,000 VAPG award will enable Maple Wind Farm to create new full time marketing and processing positions and reach regional markets with their pasture-raised poultry and pork products.

**Achieving viability through value-added dairy in Hardwick:** For three generations, the Michaud family has produced high-quality milk in the Northeast Kingdom. In 2011, they diversified, using their raw milk to produce premium ice cream and yogurt. A \$250,000 VAPG award will enable Kingdom Creamery to expand processing capacity to meet demand from national ice cream retailers.

**Increasing access to local meat in Isle La Motte:** Family-owned Happy Bird Poultry Farm & Market is the only market on the small island of Isle la Motte, providing poultry, meat, and food staples. With a \$195,000 USDA Meat Processing & Inspection Readiness Grant they will expand processing and storage capacity to meet the growing needs of their community.

**New opportunities in farm-to-cone:** Sisters of Anarchy Ice Cream makes artisanal ice cream using berries and herbs grown at their family farm, Fisher Brothers Farm. With a \$250,000 VAPG award they will expand sales regionally, invest in robust digital marketing, and double their production.

**Community center in North Calais:** With a \$222,000 NBRC award and support from VHC's Historic Preservation Program, the North Calais Memorial Hall Association will restore the town's historic hall to create a hub for community events and economic activity.

## VERMONT WAGYU, SPRING-ROCK FARM

### SPRINGFIELD

Sheila Patinkin, owner of Vermont Wagyu in Springfield, began one of the first Wagyu operations in the country in 2007. The business is now internationally recognized for its high-quality beef and innovative practices. Sheila began working with Viability Program advisor Sam Smith at the Intervale Center to assess the effectiveness of ultrasound technology in her beef operation as well as develop a comprehensive business plan. Having a plan in place enabled Sheila to seek grant funding, and through REDI, she worked with Rose Wilson to successfully apply for a USDA Value-Added Producer Grant. With a \$250,000 award, Vermont Wagyu will be able to reach new markets for frozen cuts of prime Wagyu beef through online sales and increase profitability.

“It was just incredible to have help with the grant process. Even though I have a degree in economics, I don't have Rose's experience in writing these grants or with applying that information to our farm. It was really, really helpful to work with someone so skilled and who just has so much experience with our farm.”

– Sheila Patinkin, Vermont Wagyu, Spring-Rock Farm



# BROADENING OUR IMPACT

## STRENGTHENING VERMONT’S FOOD HUB NETWORK:

### VERMONT WAY FOODS

Food hubs are critical infrastructure in Vermont for moving our renowned farm and food products from producers to consumers, both in-state and widely across the Northeast region. Since 2012, VHCB has supported a collaborative group of Vermont’s food hubs to create new markets for Vermont producers. This group includes the Center for an Agricultural Economy’s Food Venture Center and Farm Connex enterprises in Hardwick, Food Connects in Brattleboro, Green Mountain Farm to School’s Farm Direct in Newport, and the Intervale Center’s Food Hub in Burlington. In 2021, the group created a new collective Vermont brand known as Vermont Way Foods to help producers reach new markets in Vermont and beyond.



“Vermont Way Foods is committed to finding innovative ways to grow, evolve, and diversify our food system to provide opportunities for growers and producers in addition to enhancing our state’s food security.”

– Matt Landi, Vermont Way Foods

## VERMONT FOOD HUBS EXPAND MARKETS FOR PRODUCERS:

Goal to increase sales of Vermont products through Vermont Way Foods from:

**\$3 million to**  
**\$10 MILLION**  
**BY 2026**



## EXPANDING REGIONAL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE:

### AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY ALLIANCE

To strengthen business assistance available to farm and food entrepreneurs in Vermont and across the northeast, the Viability Program, together with other regional leaders, launched the Agricultural Viability Alliance (AVA). The Alliance is made up of business and technical assistance providers in New England and New York's Hudson Valley, working to enhance professional and workforce development efforts, provide networking opportunities, and ensure equitable access to high-quality business assistance for producers across the region. Awarded a \$624,060 grant by the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) to advance this work, the Viability Program has been able to fund innovative programming to expand the capacity of regional service providers and close gaps in services for a diverse range of producers.



### Developing Assistance Networks for BIPOC Farmers in Vermont:

With the resources secured by VHCB through NBRC funding, the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (NEFOC), and Vermont Land Trust have come together to provide in-depth business planning and land access assistance to farmers of color in Vermont.

## FOREST HEALTH & CONNECTIVITY:

### FORESTLAND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Since 2015, we've collaborated with Vermont Woodlands Association and Vermont 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 and Vermont's 2021 Climate Action Plan, one of the primary strategies to maintain forest integrity is to provide succession planning assistance to private owners of forestland. Three forest landowning families received succession planning services in FY21.

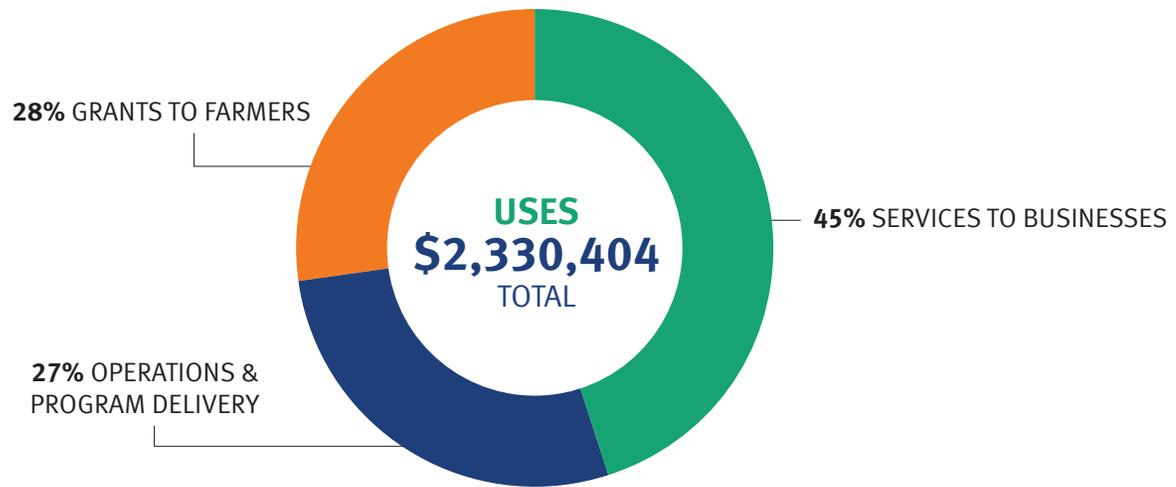
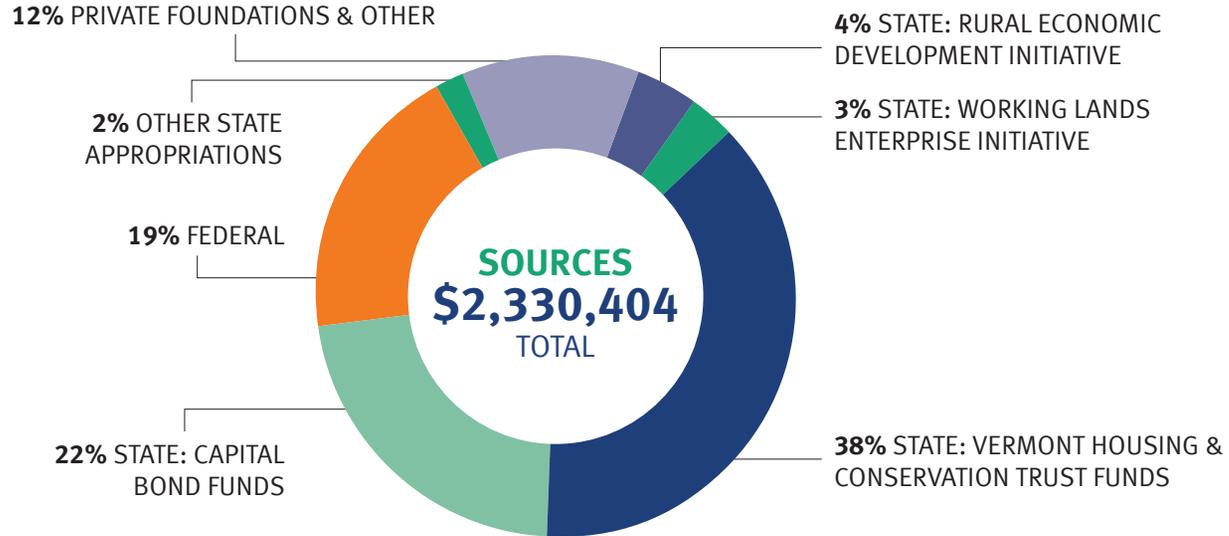
“My brother and I are eager to preserve our land and take action to make it as resilient as possible to climate change. Chris and I would like to leave it to future generations who can enjoy it the way we have, and this advising program has significantly honed our vision for the land and how to make that possible.”

– Tim Stout, Shrewsbury



# VIABILITY PROGRAM FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES – FY2021

In FY21 the Viability Program expended \$2.33 million, 31% coming from federal and private funding sources.



The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program is funded by the State of Vermont through the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. In FY21 the Viability Program also utilized funding from USDA Rural Development, VT Working Lands Enterprise Board, Northern Border Regional Commission, CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund, Vermont Economic Development Authority, Commonwealth Dairy, Vermont Community Foundation, High Meadows Fund, and the Sustainable Future Fund.

This report is produced 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(g).



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**“Assessing the financial viability of your business is so important, as scary as it can be. It can be uncomfortable but you have to know if your products are profitable to run a successful business. You need the numbers to learn whether the way you’re doing things is making enough money to live on. Business planning helps you get to those answers and outline a path toward your goals.”**

— Matt Systo & Kim Rich, Old Soul Farm, Barre

**“Before the new storage facility, the hogs were outside all winter. We’d get those crazy freeze-thaw events, and they were up to their bellies in muck. The new concrete pad is great. It’s so much cleaner, the pigs are so much happier, and it’s improved farmer comfort. We aren’t worried that their waste is flowing into the lake, which is huge. The water is everything. We need to manage it, no matter where we are in the watershed.”**

— Phelan O’Connor, Pigasus Meats, South Hero  
Water Quality Grantee

**“I have experience physically farming, but Sam helps align our ideas and data on paper in a way that’s clear and concise. He’s really in it with you and having an outside perspective brings you out of the isolation of farming. I have taken a lot of his advice and put it into action here. These programs are so helpful. One of the reasons that farming in Vermont works is because your community is made up of farmers and also these people who support farmers. It’s really special.”**

— Fae Blackmer, Common Roots Farm Manager  
South Burlington





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