

# *farm*<sup>to</sup>*plate*



STRENGTHENING VERMONT'S FOOD SYSTEM

**Farm to Plate investment program: Overview for the House Committee on  
Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry**  
1/17/25



**Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund**

# The Farm to Plate Investment Program is in Vermont Statute

## The Vermont Statutes Online

### Title 10 : Conservation And Development

### Chapter 015A : The Sustainable Jobs Fund Program

(Cite as: 10 V.S.A. § 330)

§ 330. The Farm-to-Plate Investment Program; creation; goals; tasks; methods

## Farm to Plate Investment Program: Enabling Legislation Passed in 2009

Statute passed in 2009 tasked the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF) with creating a strategic plan for agriculture and food system development, and establishing the F2P program to fulfill the following outcomes:

- 1 Increase economic development in Vermont's food and farm sector.**
- 2 Create jobs in the food and farm economy.**
- 3 Improve access to healthy local foods.**

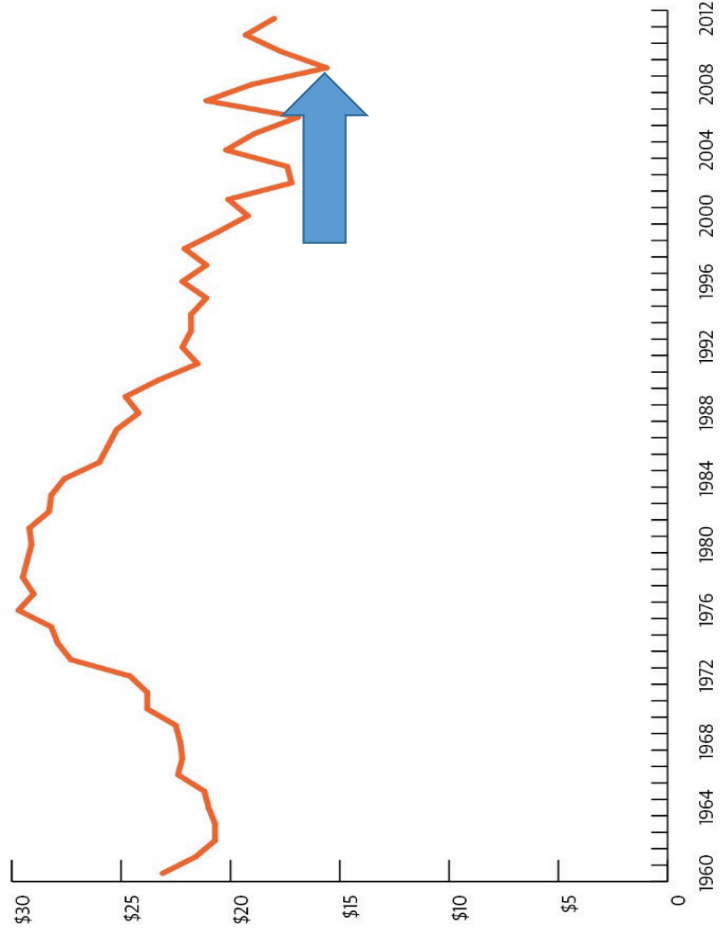


# **Why Was This Passed in 2009?**



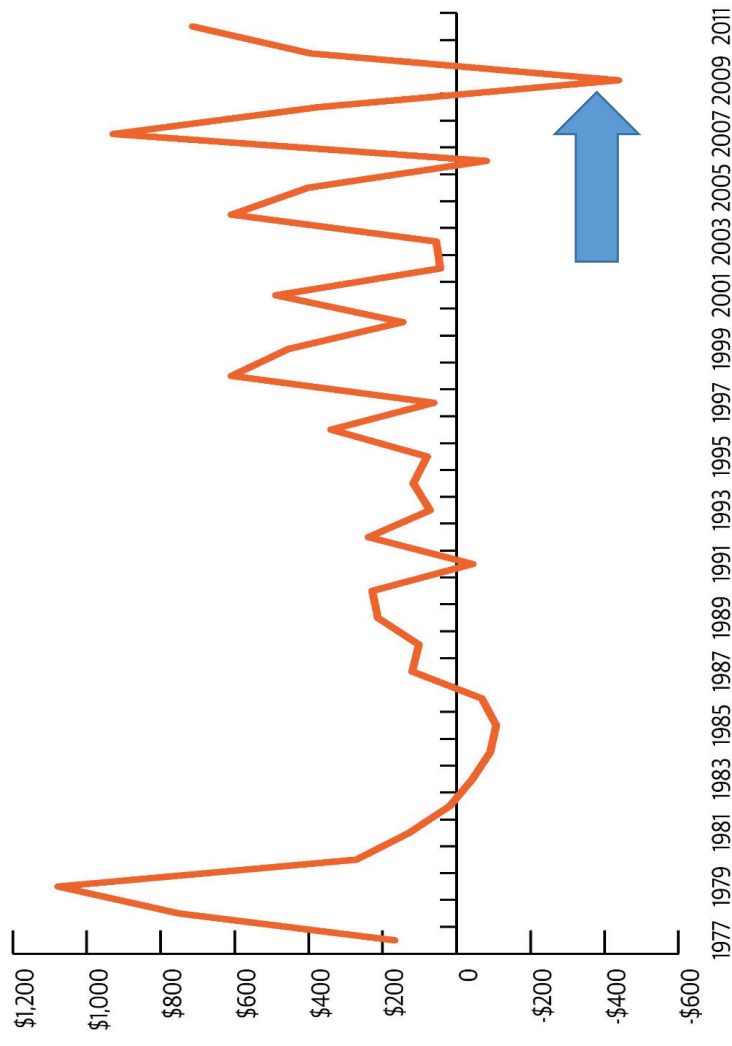
# Convergence of price and earnings in the Dairy Industry...

Vermont All-Milk Price per CWT, 1960-2012



Source: Brian Gould, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Understanding Dairy Markets, [http://future.aae.wisc.edu/data/annual\\_values/by\\_area/10?tab=prices](http://future.aae.wisc.edu/data/annual_values/by_area/10?tab=prices).

Northeast Net Earnings per Cow 1977-2011



Source: Farm Credit, Northeast Dairy Farm Summary, 2011



# ...and Emergence of New Local Food Opportunities that Needed Strategic Focus

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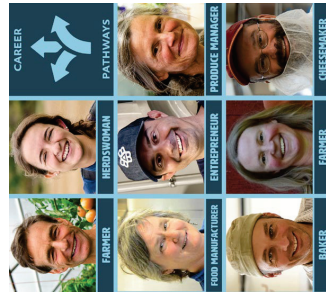
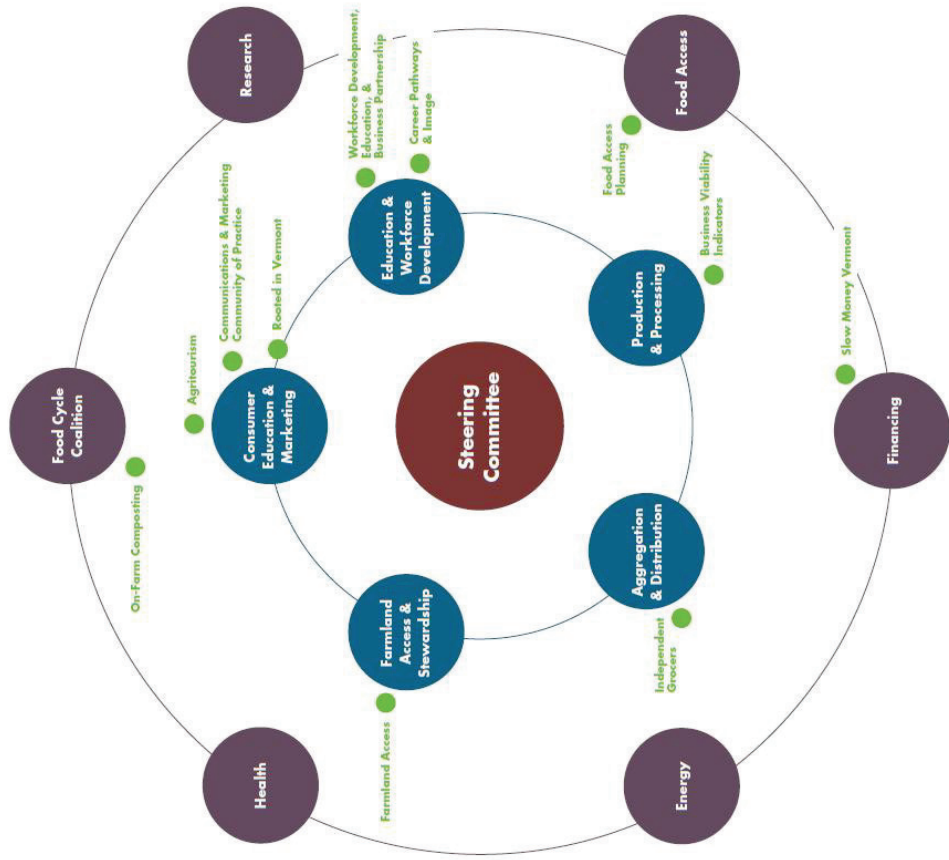




- Entering a new decade  
with these pressing  
challenges and exciting  
opportunities, and  
realizing:**
- There's no plan
  - Not enough coordinators
  - Funders and Legislators  
needed guidance



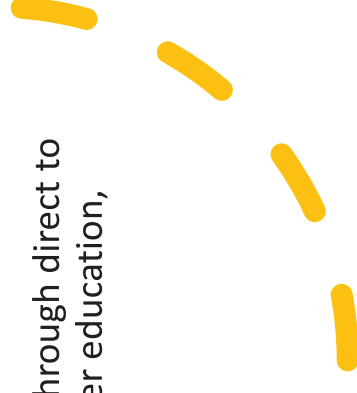
# The Farm to Plate Network: From Plan to Action



# How Did We Do?

## At the Macro Level, from 2010-2020:

- Vermont's food system economic output expanded **57.7%**, from **\$7.599 billion to \$11.985 billion**.
- Pre-COVID food system **employment (2011-2019) increased 11% or 6,189 net new jobs**; more than **65,000 Vermonters** directly employed by over **11,500 farms and food-related businesses**.
- Local food purchases rose from **\$114 million to \$371 million**, which is more than 10% of total food purchases in Vermont.
- Local food more accessible to more Vermonters through direct to consumer, grocery stores, restaurants, K-12, higher education, hospitals, and charitable food.





## How Well As a State Did We Do in Implementing Strategies From the Plan?

COMPLETION STATUS	NUMBER *
Priority strategies fully completed by F2P Network	7
Priority strategies currently underway or partially completed by F2P Network	14
Priority strategies fully completed by other entities, not as a F2P project	10
Currently underway or partially completed by other entities, not as a F2P project	29
Decided to not complete	5
Not acted on	6

- **79.7% (43/54) of High Priority Strategies** were either fully completed, or are strategies still underway or partially completed at this time
- **20.3% (11/54) of High Priority Strategies** were either not completed because initial planning or research revealed the project to be infeasible or the strategy irrelevant due to changing conditions (9.2%): OR, there was no action taken and the strategy could still be valuable to implement (11.1%)

*Note that some high-priority strategies contained multiple parts, some of which were completed/begun through the Farm to Plate Network, and others of which were completed/begun by other entities, and were counted in both of those categories, so these counts add up to more than the 54 distinct strategies.*



# How Did We Do? Network Member Evaluation

*Between 2014-2020...*

**91-93%**

Said they valued the information sharing provided through the Network

**88-94%**

Said they valued the networking opportunities provided through the Network

**79-96%**

Said the Network helped to make existing relationships stronger

**74-94%**

Said the Network helped build new relationships

**76-88%**

Said the Network helped their organization reach its own goals

**85-98%**

Said VSJF was effective in coordinating the Network

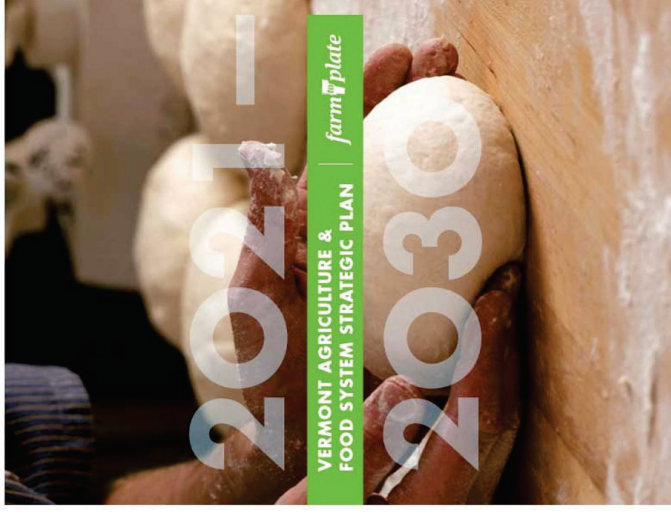
"Farm to Plate [Network] has provided an accessible venue for groups like Food Connects to engage in valuable cross-sector relationships that have resulted in significant changes in how we work to accomplish our mission. Farm to Plate has helped us build our own organizational capacity by asking better questions, developing stronger relationships and delivering more relevant programming for a larger impact. Farm to Plate makes us smarter."

Richard Berkfield, Executive Director, Food Connects

## Farm to Plate Investment Program: Reauthorized for Another 10 Years in 2019

Legislature reauthorized F2P in 2019, effectively tasking VSJF again to create 10-year strategic plan and support the program to fulfill the legislative outcomes. The outcomes were amended slightly to:

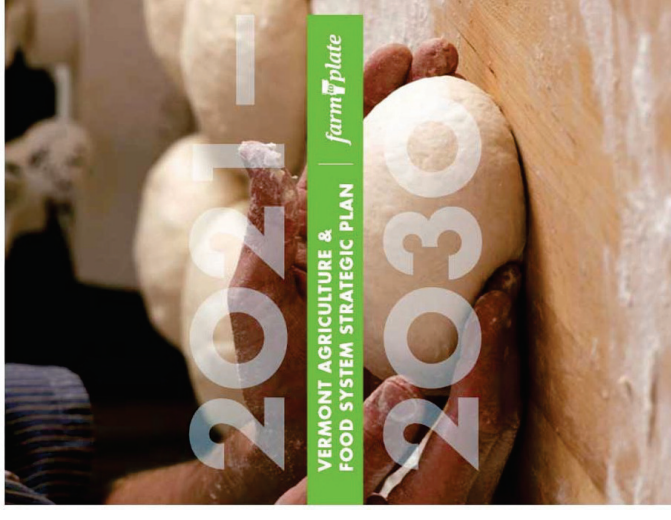
- 1** Increase sustainable economic development and create jobs in Vermont's food and farm sector
- 2** **Improve soils, water, and resiliency of the working landscape in the face of climate change**
- 3** Improve access to healthy local foods for all Vermonters



## The 2021-2030 Vermont Agriculture & Food System Strategic Plan Represents the Perspectives of Those Whose Lives and Livelihoods Rely on Food and Farming

Plan developed in partnership with Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (VAAFAM). Created with the input, knowledge, and expertise of over **1,500** people, including.

- 1** 163 expert contributors (including farmers, technical and business assistance providers, researchers, capital providers etc.) created the 54 product, market, and issue briefs in the Plan.
- 2** 120 food producers participated in industry specific focus groups
- 3** 1,159 Vermont residents contributed to a statewide survey on the future of Vermont's agriculture and food system.



**This is the State's agriculture and food system plan, and given the knowledge and expertise contained within, have confidence in consulting and referencing it in your deliberations!**



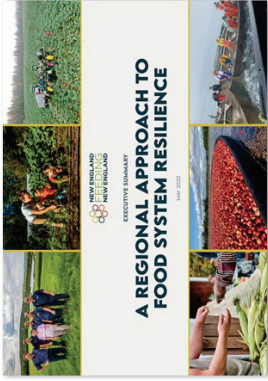
## The Farm to Plate Network: From Plan to Action



## 2024 Highlights:

- 75 farm and food businesses received distribution and retail sales technical assistance
- 15 farm and food businesses received infrastructure planning and funding technical assistance
- 7 farms participating in Beef on Dairy breeding program, and involved in new start-up Vermont Cattleman LLC
- Supporting 5 food hubs across the state to improve distribution efficiencies and infrastructure development
- Formation of Food Security Coalition
- Financial and legal feasibility analysis of shared equity farmland access models
- Funding secured for CSA & Healthcare programs to aid further program development and scaling

**"I attended the Producer, Distributor, Buyer Forum organized by the Network's Independent Grocers Program. The candid conversation and insider knowledge about distribution was invaluable. In addition, the contacts both with distributors and information sharing with other producers was ideal one-stop networking. I'm glad that I invested the time in participating, and I know that other participants felt the same way" *Becky Castle – Fisher Brothers Farm and Sisters of Anarchy Ice Cream***



## New England Feeding New England Report

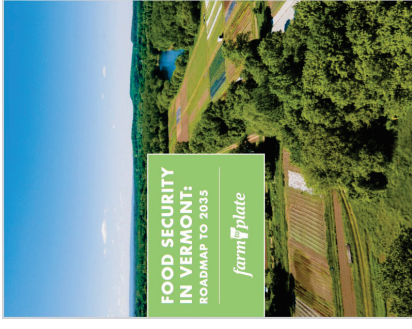
## Climate Action Plan



INITIAL VERMONT CLIMATE  
ACTION PLAN



## Gov's Commision on Future of Ag



## Food Security Roadmap

## Other Places You'll Find The Fingerprints of 2021-2030 Ag & Food System Plan

The Plan has served as a keystone or source of strategies and recommendations in other state plans, roadmaps, and reports



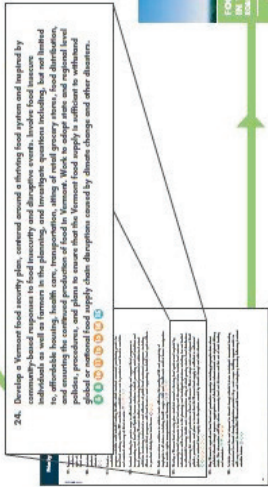


**Farm to Plate Investment Program sets forth three Legislative Outcomes**

1. Increase sustainable economic development and create jobs in Vermont's food and farm sector
2. Improve soils, water, and resiliency of the working landscape in the face of climate change
3. Improve access to healthy local foods for all Vermonters



Vermont Agriculture & Food System Strategic Plan 2021-2030



Priority Strategy #24 p. 32



Food Security in Vermont: Roadmap to 2035

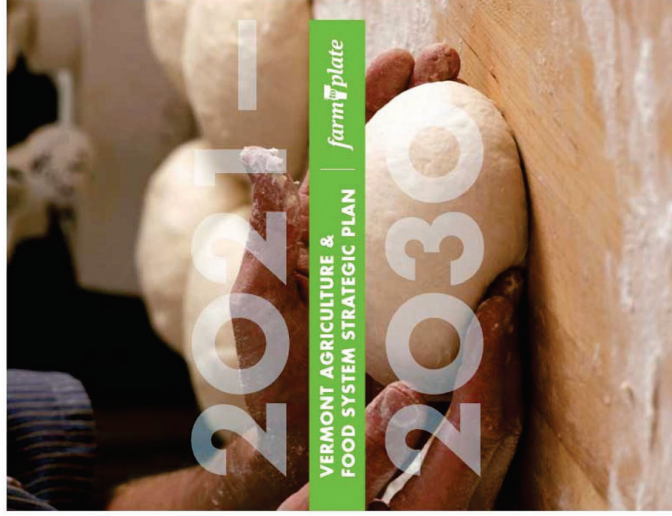
**Details on Path to Improve Access to Healthy Local Foods for all Vermonters**

- Government ensures food security for all in Vermont
- Vermont farms have the resources to be resilient
- Communities have the tools to support food security





# How to Understand & Use the Strategic Plan



*Three Legislative Outcomes*

- Vision
- Goals
- Objectives
- Priority Strategies
- Product, Market, and Issue Brief
- Recommendations

# Product, Market, and Issue Briefs (pgs 38-190, pdf pgs 40-192)

## VERMONT FOOD SYSTEM PLAN PRODUCT BRIEF



## PRODUCT: Agroforestry

### What's At Stake?

Vermont's 4.465 million acres of forest cover around 73% of its territory.<sup>1</sup> If we are to address the critical moment facing Vermont agriculture, sustainable agroforestry should be among the solutions considered and implemented. Done well, it can enhance Vermont's working landscape, supporting farmers' livelihoods, local economies, and our natural ecosystems. This short, medium, and long-term strategy can provide additional food, fiber, timber, carbon sequestration, water quality, habitat restoration, and increased livestock comfort and yields, but will need institutional support to provide farmers with sufficient capacity, expertise, and financing. Further, agroforestry can be part of an effective payment for ecosystem services system for Vermont's agricultural working lands and economy.

### Current Conditions

Agroforestry (agriculture and forestry) is the deliberate, integrated management of trees, crops, and sometimes livestock within the same area. It can enhance agricultural lands and complement natural forests, and produce food, feed, fiber, fuel, and timber products. Five agroforestry practices are recognized by the USDA including riparian forest buffers, alley cropping, windbreaks, forest farming, and silvopasture.<sup>2</sup> Agroforestry provides multiple environmental benefits and is an effective climate change mitigation strategy.<sup>3</sup> Agroforestry can sequester thousands of tons of carbon annually, at a conservative rate of one ton per acre per year.

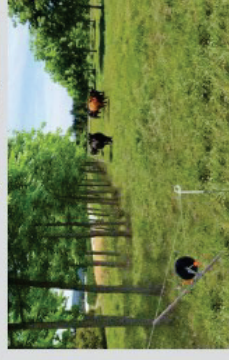
Existing cropland and pastureland production can be ecologically and economically enhanced with appropriate agroforestry implementation. Agroforestry can increase farm business revenue when farmers complement feed, food, or fiber production by adding timber and/or other forest products as another crop from the farm. Agroforestry

helps farmers adapt to climate change by integrating more trees and more diverse tree crops that can tolerate new climate conditions, for example grazing animals in well-managed marginal forest lands converted to silvopasture.

Agroforestry products can include mushrooms and maple syrup, nuts, fruits, and wood products. Using management-intensive grazing, silvopasture may increase viable grazing capabilities. Silvopasture<sup>4</sup> is one of the agroforestry practices done in Vermont, with 4.6% of Vermont's woodland acres grazed.<sup>5</sup>

Vermont officially encourages two practices, riparian buffers and windbreaks, through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) payments. Windbreaks can increase crop yields 5% to 45%,<sup>6</sup> and reduce climate stress in livestock, increasing their performance. Energy savings in buildings sheltered by windbreaks range from 10% to 40% annually.<sup>7</sup> Adding additional practices to NRCS programs would benefit the sector.

Open fields (left) versus silvopasture (right). For additional visuals and image credits, see [end notes](#).





# Priority Strategies (pgs 29-33, pdf pgs 31-35)



## Priority Strategies

### Priority Strategies

Priority strategies are the recommended programs, investments, and policies which will lead us to meet our objectives and reach our goals. In most cases, the priority strategies are a distillation of interrelated recommendations from the food system briefs and thus, if implemented, may solve challenges in multiple areas of the food system. The Supplemental Materials contain a table of the priority strategies and the recommendations from the product, market, and issue briefs from which they derive. Each priority strategy is followed by a color coded numerical icon(s) which indicate the outcome area(s) and goal(s) it addresses. The priority strategies are not listed in order of importance.

In some cases, a strategy may be within the purview and capacity of a specific organization, state agency, or the Legislature. In other cases, implementation of a priority strategy or its constituent parts can only be accomplished through multi-stakeholder collaboration. These strategies will be addressed by the Farm to Plate Network, and will inform the restructuring of the Network in the first half of 2021.

#### GOAL CATEGORIES

- Sustainable Economic Development
- Environmental Sustainability
- Healthy Local Food for All Vermonters
- Racial Equity

1. Provide at least \$1.5 million in annual funding to the Working Lands Enterprise Fund. These grant funds are a unique and critical source of capital that accelerate innovation and sustainability in Vermont food system businesses. 1 3 4 4
2. Establish funding mechanisms (e.g., agricultural loan loss reserve, farm-transfer financing) to address specific food system investment gaps (e.g., for women and BIPOC-owned businesses). 1 3 4
3. Improve funding opportunities and create equitable access for BIPOC organizations and BIPOC-owned businesses by developing multi-year, unrestricted BIPOC-centered grants and loan programs, while removing barriers such as unnecessarily long grant application processes, and combating explicit and implicit bias against BIPOC communities. 1 3 4 4
4. Rebuild Vermont's restaurant industry with equitable grant programs and business assistance, and provide local purchasing incentives to support the expansion of farm-to-table relationships. 1 2 10
5. Support stabilization and revitalization of the dairy industry through: (1) a comprehensive dairy products marketing program focused on quality that would assist producers with limited marketing budgets; (2) by expanding opportunities to differentiate the milk supply by supporting farms and processors to increase production capacity for higher-attribute milk; (3) increased capital investment and funding for dairy processing, storage, and co-packing (particularly for cheese, yogurt, butter, etc). 1 2 3
6. To increase the availability of local meat, improve productivity and processing capacity at Vermont meat slaughter and processing facilities through investment in plant upgrades, new facilities, technical assistance, and workforce development. 1 3 10
7. Make significant investment in storage, processing, and distribution infrastructure in order to enhance product innovation and quality across all Vermont food products, expand regional market access for businesses, and increase the resilience of local supply chains. This includes investments in new facilities, upgrades and maintenance to existing facilities, and energy efficiency and renewable energy incentives for food system infrastructure. 1 3 4 6 17 17
8. Support product-specific value chain development. Strategies include bringing producers, distributors, and buyers together at matchmaking events, assisting producer-driven aggregation, distribution, and marketing enterprises, and funding the development of market opportunities in the Northeast. 1 2 3 10 17





## Table of Priority Strategies with Source Reference (pgs 193-200, pdf pgs 195-202)

<p>7. Make significant investment in storage, processing, and distribution infrastructure in order to enhance product innovation and quality across all Vermont food products, expand regional market access for businesses, and increase the resilience of local supply chains. This includes investments in new facilities, upgrades and maintenance to existing facilities, and energy efficiency and renewable energy incentives for food system infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agricultural Literacy: K-12</i> Brief: Recommendation #3</li> <li>• <i>Agroforestry</i> Brief: Recommendation #6</li> <li>• <i>Beer</i> Brief: Recommendation #2</li> <li>• <i>Beer</i> Brief: Recommendation #5</li> <li>• <i>Bread</i> Brief: Recommendation #3</li> <li>• <i>Compost</i> Brief: Recommendation #2</li> <li>• <i>Direct Markets</i> Brief: Recommendation #3</li> <li>• <i>Direct Markets</i> Brief: Recommendation #5</li> <li>• <i>Distribution</i> Brief: Recommendation #1</li> <li>• <i>Distribution</i> Brief: Recommendation #3</li> <li>• <i>Eggs</i> Brief: Recommendation #1</li> <li>• <i>Eggs</i> Brief: Recommendation #4</li> <li>• <i>Food Access and Farm Viability</i> Brief: Recommendation #1</li> <li>• <i>Food-Grade Grains</i> Brief: Recommendation #1</li> <li>• <i>Food-Grade Grains</i> Brief: Recommendation #2</li> <li>• <i>Goats</i> Brief: Recommendation #2</li> <li>• <i>Lightly Processed Vegetables</i> Brief: Recommendation #3</li> <li>• <i>Lightly Processed Vegetables</i> Brief: Recommendation #4</li> <li>• <i>Produce</i> Brief: Recommendation #1</li> <li>• <i>Restaurants</i> Brief: Recommendation #3</li> <li>• <i>School Food Procurement</i> Brief: Recommendation #2</li> <li>• <i>Sheep</i> Brief: Recommendation #5</li> <li>• <i>Specialty Foods</i> Brief: Recommendation #5</li> <li>• <i>Spirits</i> Brief: Recommendation #1</li> <li>• <i>Water Quality</i> Brief: Recommendation #4</li> <li>• <i>Water Quality</i> Brief: Recommendation #5</li> </ul>
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# Strategic Goals (pgs 13-15, pdf pgs 15-17)



## Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Goals

Fifteen strategic goals articulate the results we will achieve by 2050, in service to the Vermont Legislature's intended outcomes for the Vermont Farm to Plate Investment Program:

1. Increase sustainable economic development and create jobs in Vermont's food and farm sector
2. Improve soils, water, and resiliency of the working landscape in the face of climate change
3. Improve access to healthy local foods for all Vermonters

The 15 statewide food system strategic goals are first presented together, and then each goal is presented with its objectives, the measurable improvements that represent progress and will be tracked over time to indicate the degree to which the goal has been accomplished. Some objectives already contain known targets, while other objectives require additional work to establish baselines and set specific improvement targets. The objectives will inform the actions to be taken by the Farm to Plate Network, policy makers, state agencies, and others, and will hold us all accountable to achieving our intended goals. However, they do not tell the whole story about progress toward our goals, and the absence of data should not be used to dismiss individual experiences or delay taking action on an issue. We include one data visualization per goal, with sources listed on page 27. Additional data visualizations will be available on the Farm to Plate website as they are developed. Please note that the goals are not in priority order.

### GOAL CATEGORIES

Goals are divided into four categories. The first three correspond with the three legislative outcomes. The fourth is our commitment to racial equity.

- Sustainable Economic Development
- Environmental Sustainability
- Healthy Local Food for All Vermonters
- Racial Equity

### GOAL CATEGORIES

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- Sustainable Economic Development
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# Goals Cont. – Econ and Enviro (pg 14, pdf pg 16)

## SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1. Food system economic output, employment, and establishments in Vermont will increase.
2. Demand for Vermont food will increase.
3. Vermont's production portfolio is more diverse, farm and food businesses of all types will increase their economic viability, and businesses have equitable access to capital and to production, processing, aggregation, and distribution infrastructure appropriate to their needs.
4. Vermont food system jobs provide livable wages, safe, healthy, and supportive workplace conditions, and access to health care and other benefits.
5. Vermont farms and food system businesses have sufficient, diverse, and reliable employees, and there are accessible and equitable opportunities in Vermont to gain the knowledge and skills for food system careers.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

6. Vermont farm and food businesses will increase carbon sequestration and reduce food system-related greenhouse gas emissions, and are able to adapt to climatic changes due to global warming, including floods, droughts, extreme storms, and pest and disease pressures.
7. Vermont farm stewardship is increasing ecological diversity and improving soil and water quality, and farm stewards are supported, compensated, and recognized for their positive contributions to the environment and public good.
8. Vermont's agricultural land remains in productive agricultural use, access to that land is more affordable and equitable, and land-use planning decisions maintain and promote a strong and viable food system.
9. Edible food, food scraps, and other food residuals are used for their highest purpose, and not considered waste.





## Goals Cont. – Access for All and Racial Equity (pg 15, pdf pg 17)

### HEALTHY LOCAL FOOD FOR ALL VERMONTERS GOALS

Vermont Agricultural and Food System Strategic Goals

10. The amount of Vermont-grown food that fulfills the dietary and cultural needs of people in Vermont will increase.
11. All people in Vermont increasingly have the financial resources to access local food, including through programs that provide support for purchasing local food.
12. All people in Vermont are able to access locations in which local food is sold, served, or provided.
13. All people in Vermont can access the knowledge, skills, and resources to select, grow, hunt, fish, forage, process, store, and prepare local food.
14. Vermont's food system is resilient and able to provide adequate and accessible healthy local food in the face of emergencies—including climate-related natural disasters.

### RACIAL EQUITY GOAL

15. Food system organizations and stakeholders prioritize racial equity and actions to eradicate structural racism in their work, are accountable to Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) leadership, and support BIPOC participation and representation.

## **Thank You!**

This committee has been an essential partner in making our food system more viable, sustainable and resilient, food secure, and just.