

**House Committee on
Agriculture, Food
Resiliency, and Forestry**
January 29, 2025



**Vermont
Housing &
Conservation
Board**

Gus Seelig
Executive Director

Stacy Cibula
Agricultural Director

Liz Gleason
Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program Director



Honey Field Farm, Norwich



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Board

Statutory Purpose

“the dual goals of creating affordable housing for Vermonters, and conserving and protecting Vermont’s agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.”

10 V.S.A.15 §302

Dual goals
in Shaftsbury



Lake Paran Village



Robert Frost Stone House Museum



Lake Paran



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VHCB All-time Results*

State Investment: \$552M | Leverage: \$2.4B



Goulet Farm, South Hero
(conservation work underway)



16,335 permanently affordable homes
(rental & homeownership)



822 farms conserved
across 175,755 acres



278,741 acres conserved
natural areas, forestland & recreational lands



87 historic preservation projects



1,300 working lands businesses served

*Since inception through June 30, 2024



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Conservation Impact since 2020



Rebop Farm, Brattleboro

22,674

acres conserved across
25 towns in 10 counties

NATURAL LANDS

56 projects
9,997 acres

WETLANDS

843 acres of special water quality
protection zones
53 miles of surface water

FARMLAND

78 farms
12,677 acres

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

14 projects
12 towns
8 counties

VHCB Housing Impacts since 2020*

4,964 households served (rental & homeownership)

Total VHCB investment: \$377.4M → Total leverage: \$680.6M

RENTAL

2,303 total units

1,925 new units

694 homes for unhoused Vermonters

SHELTER

24 shelters served total

10 new shelters

571 beds

269 new beds total

HOMEOWNERSHIP

389 households supported

169 new construction

single-family homeownership units

ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

384 households received accessibility improvements

MOBILE HOME COMMUNITIES

27 infill units

944 lots in 11 communities

FARMWORKER HOUSING

59 repair projects

6 replacement projects

237 farmworkers to be served

RECOVERY RESIDENCES

4 projects

59 residents benefitted

LEAD ABATEMENT

77 households served

58 apartments

19 single-family homes

*January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2024



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Farmworker Housing



Percy Farm, Stowe

Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program

A Champlain Housing Trust (CHT) loan fund program to finance the repair, improvement, and replacement of farmworker housing. UVM Extension Service and RuralEdge are acting as partners with CHT in helping with outreach to farmers about the program.

Repair Program Impacts

- 18 units complete | 67 workers & family members housed
- 50 units in progress to house 190 workers & family members
- Totals: 68 units for 257 workers and family members

Replacement Program Impacts

- 6 units completed or in process | 25 beneficiaries
- 4 possible units in pipeline | 17 beneficiaries



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Farm Conservation Supports Rural Economy



Corse Dairy, Whitingham



Chaput Farm, Troy



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Farmland Conservation



- 822 farms conserved
- 175,755 acres conserved
- 18-month pipeline: 64 projects, 11,859 acres, \$30M
- Strong partnership with NRCS – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Badger Brook Meats, Danville

photo credit Badger Brook Meats



The Roots Farm Market, Middlesex



Old Soul Farm, Barre

Impact on Working Lands

- Help farmers retain their lands
- Protect land from development
- Secure land for ag use & ensure farmland stays in ag use
- Affordably transfer land to next generation
- Help new farmers affordably access land

Development Rights & Farmland Affordability





Price of Conserved Land

VHCB Funded Farms - 2020 to 2023





Baird Farm, Chittenden



Hursch Farm, Morristown



Wood's Market Garden, Brandon

Farmland Access & Succession

- Between 2018 and 2023, nearly 40% of projects were farm transfers
- Decreases cost of land
- Helps new and beginning farmers get on land and existing farmers to expand
- Technical assistance provided through VHCB's Farm and Forest Viability Program

Farm Transfers



The Farm Upstream, Jericho



Co-benefits of conserved farmland

Project Highlights:

- 63 acres of prime agricultural soil
- 10,000 feet of 50' buffers on the Mad River
- 38 acres of Mad River frontage within a River Corridor Easement funded by Vermont DEC
- 8 acres of riparian protections with support from the USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
- 6 acres of permanently retired cropland
- Over a mile of public trails – extension of the Mad River Path



Defreest Farm, Waitsfield

Photo credit: Vermont Land Trust

- VHCB conserved farmland is 33% forested, 43% pasture/hay, 10% wetlands, 14% annual crops.
- Since 2019, 80 miles of buffers established and 1,400 acres of wetlands protected on conserved farms.
- 71% of all cultivated acres in Vermont were managed for no-till or reduced till. (2022 USDA Ag Census)

Farmland Access and Viability



Lisa MacDougall
photo credit Mighty Food Farm



Mighty Food Farm, Shaftsbury
photo credit Mighty Food Farm



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Farm & Forest Viability Program



Sunday Bell Farm, Danville

- In-depth, individualized business assistance
- Succession planning, financial management, access to capital, land search and access, bookkeeping, improving profitability
- 108 clients in 2024 represented \$42 million in economic activity and over 300 jobs
- 36% average increase in profitability

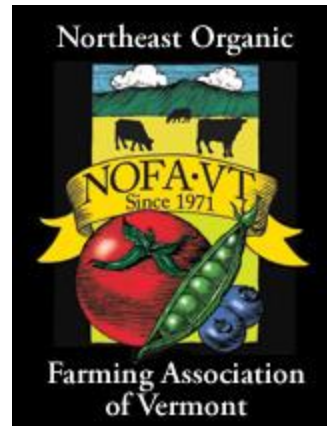


Pigagus Meats, South Hero

2024 Business Vitality Metrics



Collaborative Network of Partners



Service Provider Network:

- Center for an Agricultural Economy
- Intervale Center
- Land For Good
- NOFA-VT
- UVM Extension

Other partners:

- Vermont Land Trust
- VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
- Liberation Ecosystems
- Healthy Roots Collaborative
- Northeast Forests
- Food Connects

Land Access & Farm Transfer



Maple Cedar View Farm, Derby



Nebraska Knoll Sugar Farm, Stowe



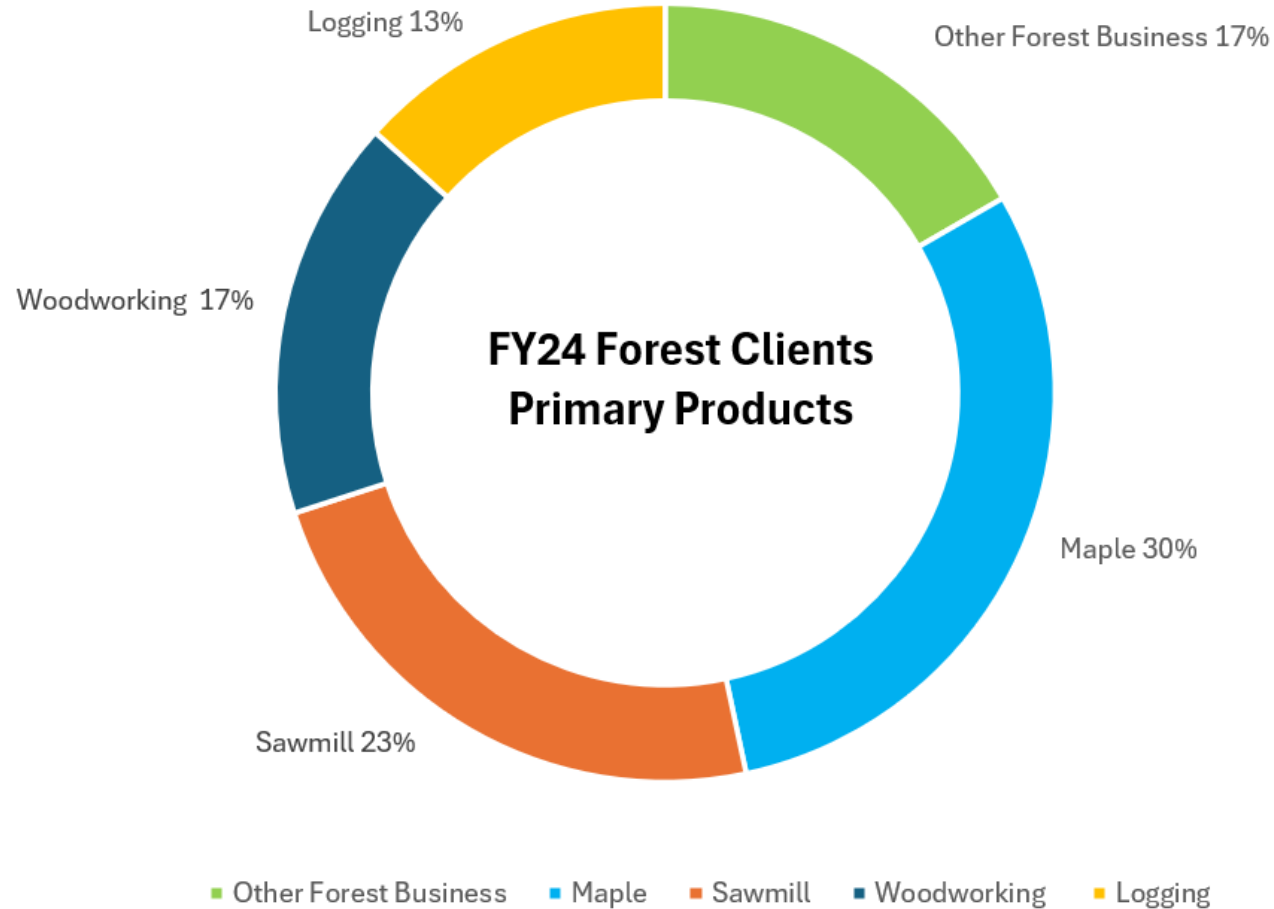
Mighty Food Farm, Shaftsbury



Molly Brook Farm, West Danville

- 100% of transfer planning clients in 2024 reported that the farm will continue after support from Farm Viability
- 1 in 10 clients enroll to help access land

Forest Economy



Implementation Grants

“Without a doubt, my farm business has more potential for success because of the support and assistance from Farm Viability.”

—Becca Knouss

- Catalyze key projects to bring business & transfer plans to fruition
- 16 grants in 2024 will increase climate resilience and grow local food and forest businesses
- 170 grants made over 15 years, totaling \$840,000



The Goat Project, Bennington



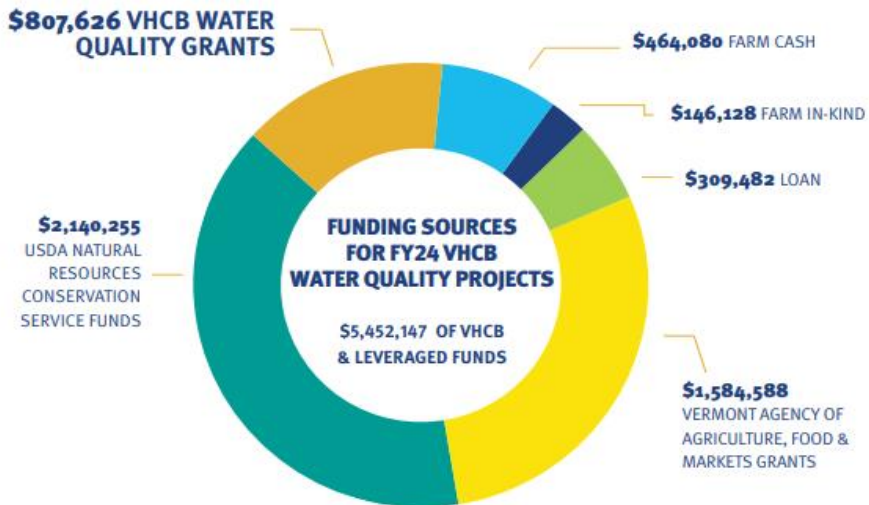
Grateful Morning Farm, Shaftsbury



Mama's Farm, Williston

Water Quality Grants

- 20 grants in 2024 will reduce runoff, boost soil health, improve manure management, and increase grazing infrastructure
- \$807K in 2024 leveraged an additional \$4.6 million
- \$4.9 million awarded since 2017
- Flexible addition to State's clean water programming



Severy Farm, Cornwall

Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)

\$1,086,681 → **\$22,751,701**

REDI FUNDS SINCE 2017

GRANTS TO COMMUNITIES



Bridgewater Community Center

REDI assists small towns and working lands businesses access capital for critically needed economic development projects

Focus areas: community-based economic development and downtown revitalization, working lands, outdoor recreation

BRIDGEWATER COMMUNITY CENTER:
The Bridgewater Area Community Foundation secured \$430,000 from ACCD's Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP)



Currier Forest Products, Danville

GROWING MARKETS FOR SUSTAINABLE FOREST PRODUCTS IN DANVILLE: Currier Forest Products produces sustainably harvested, custom milled wood products on land stewarded by the family for nearly 200 years. With a \$220,600 USDA Value-Added Producer grant, the business will expand marketing, grow sales by 50%, and add an employee.

Securing Funds for Working Lands Projects

- Maplebrook Farm - \$500K secured for mozzarella
- Happy Bird Farm - \$195K secured for poultry processing
- Vermont Livestock Slaughter and Processing - \$1M secured to triple production



"In dairy, there's never a budget for equipment improvements that are forward thinking vs putting out fires. We've never applied for a grant, and this would've been too daunting without a strong team to help us. This grant will get us to a stage in one year that would've taken 5+...the impact is hard to put into words."

– Alex Englert, Maplebrook Farm



Supporting Small Towns to Access Big Funding:

- \$1 million in federal funds for water infrastructure in North Hero
- \$120,000 in USDA funds for upgrades to the historic Sheldon General Store
- \$500,000 to historic community center in South Hero

We wouldn't have known who to reach out to for help without REDI and wouldn't have submitted such a competitive application without this support. This grant will provide the security businesses need to grow sustainably and benefit the community."

– Corinn Julow, Town of North Hero



Sheldon General Store, Rupert

Thank you!

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