3 Big Floods in 13 Years
impacts, responses, lessons

perspective of a vegetable and berry specialist

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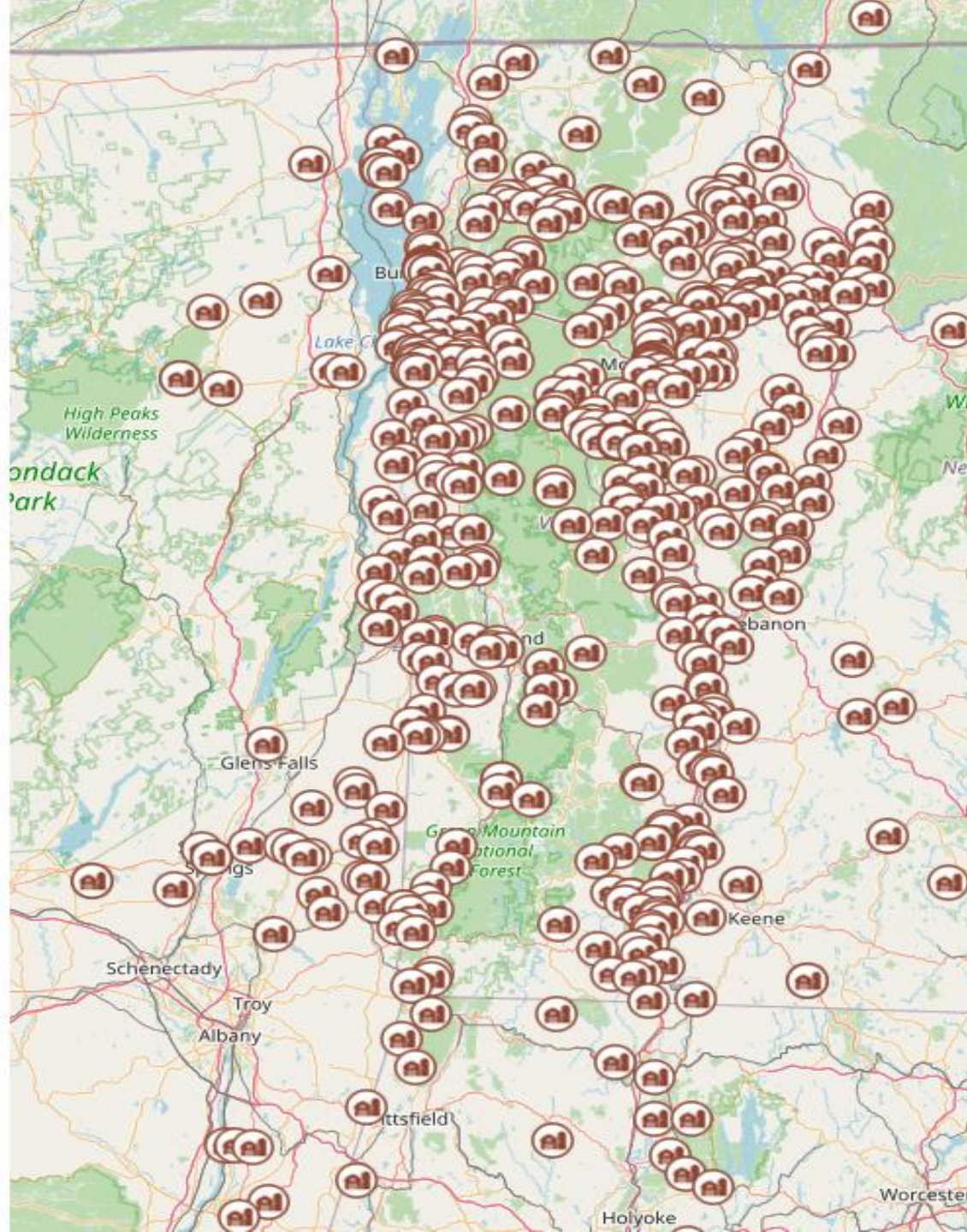
Member Farms List & Map

Commercial Member Directory

Additional Resources

Website Feedback

Log Out

VERMONT
VEGETABLE & BERRY GROWERS ASSOC.

400+ farms

2011

Statewide

Surprising

Late August

2023

Statewide and beyond

Early July

Preceded by freeze, followed by lots of rainfall
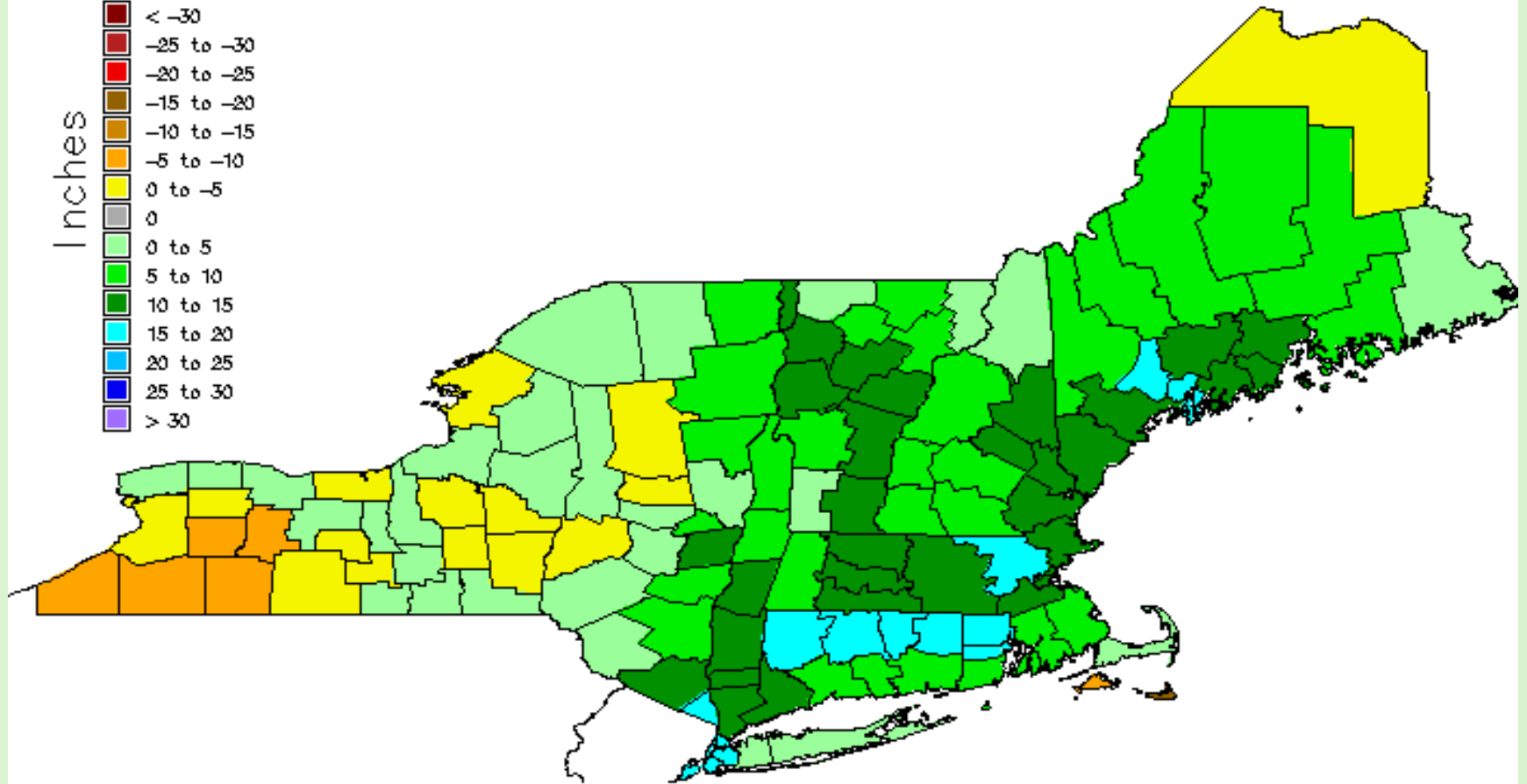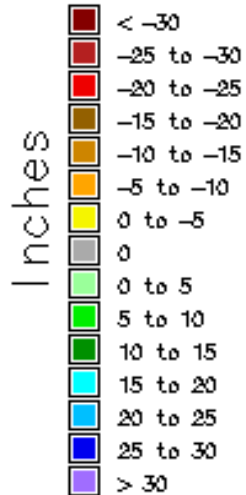
2024

A swath across northern VT

Early July

Much of the Northeast had excessive rainfall in 2023. Dark green counties had rainfall of 10"to 15" above normal.

Precipitation Departures from Normal
365 Day
Ending 2024-01-17

Inches

< -30
-25 to -30
-20 to -25
-15 to -20
-10 to -15
-5 to -10
0 to -5
0
0 to 5
5 to 10
10 to 15
15 to 20
20 to 25
25 to 30
> 30

Source: NOAA Northeast River Forecast Center, Norton, MA

2011

476 farms reported crop losses to FSA of 7200 acres of hay, 6000 acres of corn, 1750 acres of pasture, 1400 acres of sugarbush, 600 acres of vegetables and fruits, and 225 acres of soybeans. Damage to 9100 acres of land.

(Under-) estimated aggregate losses of **$20 million.**

2023

264 farms reported aggregate losses of **$16.1 million** with 27,318 acres impacted in a survey. BEGAP applications reported **$44.7 million in farm losses**

2024

86 farms reported aggregate losses of **$5.4 million** with 3379 acres impacted in a survey, BEGAP applications reported **$13 million in farm losses.**

damaged transportation infrastructure

Rt. 100 after tropical storm Irene in 2011

interrupted energy supply

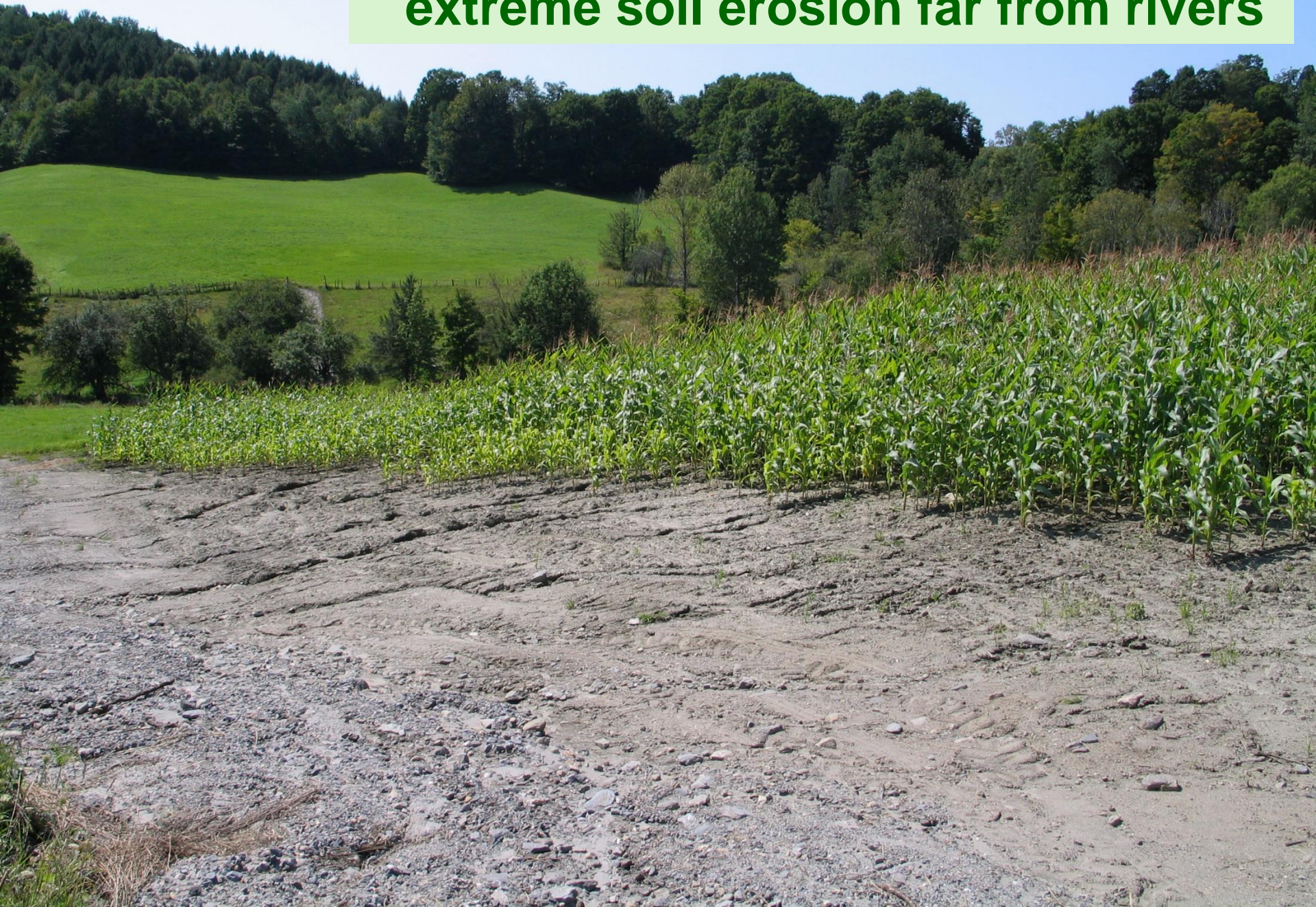loss of farm soil

loss of farm land

Lots of silt in some fields

Photo from Justin's Instagram

loss of an entire farm – had been there 200 years

extreme soil erosion far from rivers

loss of livestock feed

09/03/2011 14:23

loss of feed quality

09/03/2011 14:40

loss of food quality

increased food safety risks

Need to rescue livestock

infrastructure damage

Some flood plain fields typically go underwater

Photo from Seven Days

Some flooding was unusual – in 2024, a vegetable field at 1,600 ft. elevation in a "mountain bowl"

Impacts varied with timing, product, etc.

- Irene came in August; veg farms had already made some money; livestock farms lost most of their feed.

- In 2023 floods came in July, there were a lot of "stranded costs" in the field. It kept raining, which caused as much or more damage than flooding.

- In 2024 the geographic scope was smaller, but the rain was more intense, and focused.
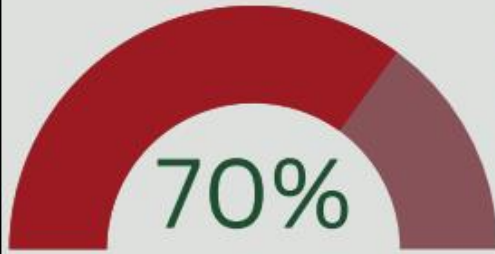
A few farms were hit by all 3 events

Emergency financial support

- State (BEGAP) reimbursements were a financial lifeline for many flooded farms, even if payments took a while to arrive.

- NOFA-VT provided fast, but small ($5k) emergency grants.

- Intervale farms have their own modest flood recovery fund.

- After Irene in 2011 the Vermont Community Foundation raised and gave out $1.2 m quickly in $10k grants. By 2023, institutional knowledge of that process had to be rebuilt. Awarded $1.5 million to 157 farms in 2023.

- Most VT farms do not have crop insurance, or NAP, and those that do typically get very modest payments; some are still waiting for payments from 2023.

Uninsured Producers
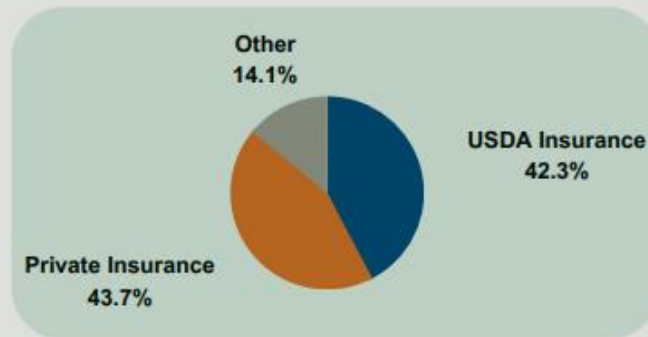
2023 n=264

70% of respondents have no crop or livestock insurance

One of the most important metrics measured by the survey is the percentage of respondents without crop or livestock insurance. A huge majority, 70%, have no crop or livestock insurance.

14% of respondents are enrolled in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)

Of those who are insured, an almost equal number are insured through the USDA or private insurance.

Other 14.1%

USDA Insurance 42.3%

Private Insurance 43.7%

Crop insurance programs are generally not working well for Vermont farms.

It's a longer conversation but in a nutshell, payments are low, take a long time, and are not predictable.

From VT Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets flood damage surveys

Farmers support each other.
Seedling donations in 2023

Supporting flooded field soil health – UVM Extension program with VAAFM support

Some immediate farmer responses

- **Saving what can be saved before, and right after, flood**

- **Making payroll**

- **Navigating and applying for funding**

- **Calculating and reporting losses**

- **Communicating with customers and GoFundMe's**

- **Dealing with publicity**

- **Pivoting to new markets**

- **Finding new suppliers (e.g. seedlings, livestock feed)**

Support Joe's Brook Farm After Devastating Flood

The public wants to help after a flood, but not all farms have the direct relationships needed.

Share

Donate now

This fundraiser is located near you

Daniel Deatrick
$100 · 5 mos

How are farmers responding longer term?

- **Changing crops/rotation/grazing on floodplains**

- **Seeking to add some higher ground land**

- **More high tunnels (out of flood plain) on vegetable farms**

- **Improving communication with customers**

- **Reconsidering markets that require use of at-risk land**

- **Rethinking equipment and infrastructure risk**

- **More receptive to disaster planning, insurance**

Contamination?

This is another longer conversation but in summary we have sampled flooded and unflooded fields and found no "red flags"

A few key recommendations

- **Use a unified disaster loss reporting form**

- **Establish a permanent farm emergency fund**

- **Fix / simplify crop insurance if possible**

- **Coordinate (to reduce) communications to farmers**

- **Support disaster and resilience planning!**

Farm resilience checklist developed after Irene

https://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/factsheets/FarmResilienceChecklist.html

Thank you