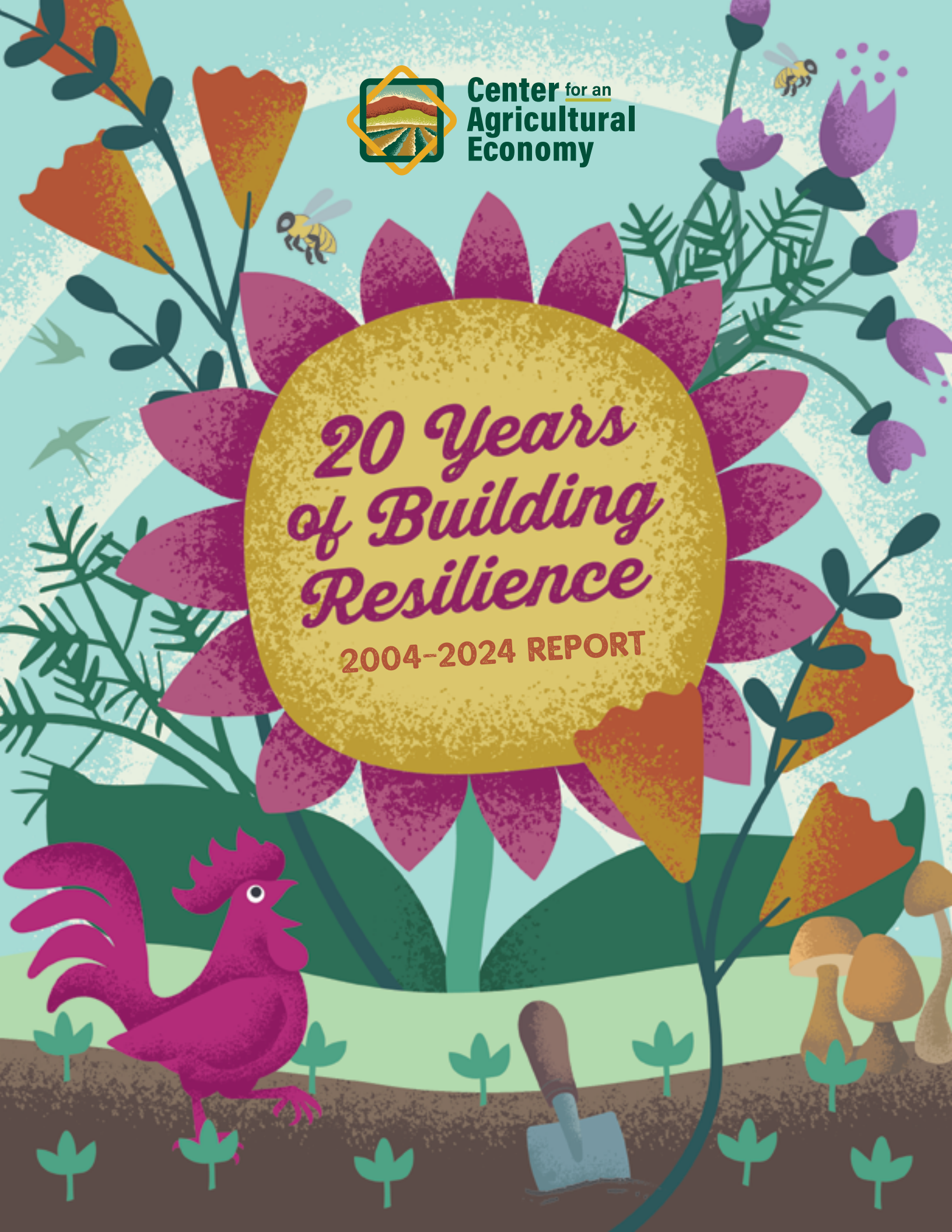




Center for an
Agricultural
Economy

*20 Years
of Building
Resilience*

2004-2024 REPORT





Board members and staff celebrate CAE's 20th anniversary with cupcakes (Photo: Kelly Bogel Stokes)

20 YEARS OF...

20 years ago the Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) was founded on the belief that a local food system is critical to the long-term sustainability of rural communities in Vermont. This meant not only supporting the farms and businesses but also the people of a community. This is why CAE has always interwoven programs that support economic viability with community engagement and education. Relationships and listening inform our work. The community guides our foundational principles of abundant and accessible local food, healthy working lands and thriving communities.

CAE is designed to be adaptive to our ever changing world. During moments of crisis CAE pivots and utilizes its programs and places to respond to emerging needs. By cultivating deep relationships with partners we broaden our impact and the strength with which we can respond.

PEOPLE WHO DIG IN

One constant over the years is that CAE's work is dynamic, fast paced, and continuously evolving. Since CAE's founding, it is the dreams and dedication of the founders, board, staff, and community members that make CAE's work possible. We'd like to express deep appreciation for those who have been a part of CAE over the years, and to our current staff and board. Their connection to local agriculture, and to each other, has pushed the work forward.

As CAE looks ahead to the next 20 years we will continue making investments that respond to our climate crisis. CAE is continuing to develop viable markets and providing resources to our farms and food businesses so they can thrive and local food remains accessible. This work will take shape through shared learning, community organizing and deepening our relationships with partners and individuals.

Thank you to all the people who have been involved in CAE over the past 20 years. Thank you for your vision and support. We could not have accomplished this without you!! Lastly this work is only possible with an amazing team of people who are passionate, caring, resourceful and incredibly hardworking, the CAE staff!!!

Gratefully,

Jon



AMAZING STAFF

Kiana
Just Cut Production Assistant

Kim Barup
Just Cut Production Assistant

Reeve Basom
Place-Based Education
Coordinator

Chandra Blackmer
Just Cut Production Manager

Kristin Blodgett
Vermont Farm Fund Manager

Colleen Crist
Production Advisor

Silene DeCicucies
Farm Business Planner

Helen Doyle
Accounting Coordinator

Bob Duggan
Warehouse Coordinator and
Atkins Orchard Manager

Bethany Dunbar
Community Programs Manager

Yarrow Fought
Food Hub Operations Manager

Meryl Friets
Farm Connex Logistics Manager

Corey Hennessey
Special Projects Manager

Theo Holmes
Farm Connex Business Manager

Allyson Howell
Food Sovereignty Organizer

Kevin Hudnell
Finance Manager

Jess Huyghebaert
Administrative Operations
Coordinator

Becca Jordan
Development Manager

Daniel Keeney
Farm and Food Business
Specialist

Lance MacKenzie
Farm Connex Delivery Driver

Don Maynard
Farm Connex Delivery Driver

Dennel McKenzie
Just Cut Production Assistant

Brandon Millett
Warehouse Coordinator

Bill Morley
Farm Connex Delivery Driver

Kate O'Neill
Human Advocacy Director

Josh Peets
Just Cut Team Leader

Jon Ramsay
Executive Director

Lylee Rauch-Kacenski
Communications Manager

Neal Renaud
Farm Connex Delivery Driver

Murphy Robinson
Farm Connex Delivery Driver

Lotty Roozkrans
Food Hub Account Manager

Kelly Stokes
Database & Communications
Coordinator

Katt Tolman
Grants Manager

Neil Urie
Farm Connex Delivery Driver

Isabel Villarroel
Just Cut Production Assistant

Lorenzo Whitcomb-Paulson
Farm Connex Delivery Driver

Malayna White
Just Cut Production Assistant

Hayley Williams
Local Food Coordinator &
Hardwick Farmers Market
Manager

CAE BOARD OF (DEDICATED) DIRECTORS

Helen Beattie, Co-chair
Tom Carroll
Meredith Davis

Christina Goodwin
Blair Marvin
Peter Merrill, Treasurer

Libby Mullin
Ben Nottermann, Secretary

Margie Prevot, Co-chair
Fan Watkinson

THANK YOU

Thank you to the founding entrepreneurs who believed deeply that a local economy supporting a local food system is possible, and for setting us on the journey to make that vision a reality. Thank you to every single staff and board member for giving your time, energy, and passion to CAE in service to a thriving local food system and community.

WHERE WE ARE

We honor the people and stories of the land on which we live and work. We honor the land as our partner and teacher. CAE exists on unceded land of the Abenaki People. Please consider learning the story of the land you are on, including indigenous stewardship, past and present. Follow this link to an interactive map to learn more: native-land.ca

2004 OUR ROOTS

After returning from eight years of working on federal agricultural policy in DC, Vermonter Andrew Meyer was clear that Vermont's agricultural future could not be based on federal policy and understanding alone.

“ I felt very strongly that if we were going to create a vibrant ag economy at the local level that we need to do that from the local level. During that time we found that there's a number of mission-based companies that are right inline with that, along with a very strong community in the Hardwick area that believes we can have an economy based on food and agriculture. ”

- ANDREW MEYER, 2009 VPR INTERVIEW

With those beliefs in mind, Meyer worked with other local “agripreneurs”(Agricultural-based entrepreneurs) and on March 15th, 2004 the “Center for a Biobased Economy” was born, later renamed the Center for an Agricultural Economy. The founders saw an opportunity to build upon local tradition and bring together community resources needed to develop a locally-based 21st century food system in the greater Hardwick region. Grown from rural communities' desire to rebuild their economic and ecological health through strong, secure, and revitalized agricultural systems, CAE and our partners work to meet both our own local food needs and to create new opportunities to export food to the rest of the state and beyond.

Students carry winter squash harvested for Pies For People in 2018 (Photo: CAE Staff)



2022

2020

2018

2016

2014

2012

2010

2008

2006

2004



2023

2021

2019

2017

2015

2013

2011

2009

2007

2005

2003

| Kale harvest at Foote Brook farm in Johnson in 2014 (Photo: CAE Staff)

In the early days CAE described the work as being divided into four major areas: sharing the vision, building infrastructure, partnering, and organizational development. Twenty years later, those buckets still define CAE's work, though the activities have deepened and widened over time. In 2005, CAE helped create the first Regional Food System Plan for the Northeast Kingdom, which identified the following goal for increasing food security in our area: "NEK residents will increasingly become more food secure; will have economic access to fresh, healthy, and local foods; and food-related health outcomes will be improved."

In August of 2008, CAE opened its first physical office space on Main Street in Hardwick. By the end of 2009, the organization had helped to create and support over 100 jobs in the area connected to local food: from jobs in the founders' companies ranging from tofu production, farming and cheese making, to new ventures like a community supported restaurant in Hardwick. In 2023, CAE supported over 500 food system businesses across Vermont and connected with thousands of community members through events, classes, and local schools. Through the addition of the Just Cut and Farm Connex programs CAE now intersects with tens of thousands of eaters at school and hospital cafeterias and shoppers at co-ops and farm stands across Vermont. The rest of this report will dive into how CAE's work grew and changed over time, while staying true to the mission of supporting a thriving agricultural economy and the community that supports it.

2006 A GREEN SPACE FOR THE COMMUNITY

In 2006, the organization started dreaming about purchasing a piece of land in Hardwick known as Atkins Field, and turning it into a public green space for education, farming, recreation, and relationship building. In 2008, that dream was realized when CAE purchased the property as a space for the community to grow food and learn together. An easement by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board ensures that Atkins Field will always be open to the public.

Clockwise from top left: Students at the Reach! program at Hardwick Elementary grow food for the Hardwick Area Food Pantry in the community garden at Atkins Field in 2021 (Photo: CAE Staff). Green Mountain Tech & Career Center Forestry Games held at Atkins Field in 2015 (Photo: CAE Staff). 3rd Graders from Hardwick Elementary helped plant 16 trees at Atkins Field with support and a grant from the Vermont Garden Network, May 2023 (Photo: Reeve Basom). Community members gather to celebrate the grand opening of the pavilion at Atkins Field in 2019 (Photo: CAE staff).



2022

2020

2018

2016

2014

2012

2010

2008

2006

2004

2023

2021

2019

2017

2015

2013

2011

2009

2007

2005

2003

A Brief History of Atkins Field

1900's Woodbury Granite Company owned Atkins Field, and grew to employ nearly 1,400 people in Hardwick.

1935: The Company closed and the space became an informal town green for decades. In 1950, the Hardwick Kiwanis Club hosted the first Spring Festival, a tradition that continues today.

2008: CAE purchased Atkins Field.

2011: Hardwick Farmers Market moves to Atkins Field.

2013: Hardwick Community Gardens move to Atkins Field.

2015: Community Hoop House is built and gardens expand.

2016: Community orchard is created and permaculture plantings are completed by Hazen high school students.

2017: CAE and partners collected reusable dishes to start a plate lending library, allowing events like Springfest to be more sustainable by reducing the use of disposables. At Springfest people ate off of the reusable dishes, and together over 400 people simultaneously washed the dishes (briefly) breaking the Guinness World Record for the most dishes washed at one time. (Photo: CAE Staff)



2019: Timber frame open-air pavilion built with scissor truss design to mimic the granite shed's internal structure.

2020: Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Atkins Field was a critical community resource as a safe gathering space with internet for all types of community meetings and activities. It was also a spot for meal distribution, school activities, Grow Your Own workshops, socially-distanced drive-in movies, and more.

2021: University of Vermont engineering students created a vision and plans for a repurposed granite shed.

2022: Schematic design created to assess how the 350-foot granite shed can be renovated.

2023: Atkins Field was covered by a foot of water in the July flooding, the structures on the property that were intentionally built to withstand flooding had minimal damage. The community came together to clean up Atkins Field. The community garden beds (destroyed from the flooding) were rebuilt in the hugelkultur style to be more resilient.

2009-2011 A COMMERCIAL KITCHEN FOR ALL

Early on the CAE team conducted studies to identify existing agricultural community assets, and what was missing. They determined that Hardwick needed a food business incubator and so, in 2009, CAE started conversations with the Vermont Food Venture Center (VFVC), then located in Fairfax, VT. With the help of many advocates, and State and Federal support, it was decided that a new state-of-the-art facility would be built in Hardwick, the Vermont Food Venture Center 2.0. In addition to being a hub for food production, storage, and aggregation for local farms, the new facility would also offer technical assistance and business advising. By 2011, the new VFVC opened its doors to its first storage clients. In addition to three incubator kitchens rented by the hour by dozens of food producers, the Venture Center also holds one of Jasper Hill Farm's facilities, where they have produced several of their award winning cheeses for the past 12 years, including their Willoughby and Harbison cheeses.

Since its opening, the VFVC has supported over 100 farmers and entrepreneurs to create hundreds of different value-added products, from salsas and syrups to frozen mac and cheese and veggie burgers. VFVC incubator kitchen clients sell over \$1.5 million in products a year.

Vermont Food Venture Center statistics from 2011-2024:

120 Production clients

124 Storage clients

27,860 Kitchen hours used, including Just Cut

218 VFVC food business consultations

CAE staff hang the Vermont Food Venture sign from the original building on the new Hardwick facility in August 2011
(Photo: CAE Staff)



2022

2020

2018

2016

2014

2012

2010

2008

2006

2004

2023

2021

2019

2017

2015

2013

2011

2009

2007

2005

2003

2011 HOPE SPRINGS FROM DISASTER

When the barn that housed Pete's Greens burned to the ground in January 2011, owner and CAE founding board member Pete Johnson was amazed at the outpouring of community support. With donations from all corners of Vermont and beyond, Pete's Greens was able to build back quickly, in time for the upcoming growing season. Inspired, Pete imagined the day that he could "pay it forward" by seeding a loan fund for Vermont farmers with "repayments" of the generous contributions he received in his time of need. CAE shared Pete's vision and the Vermont Farm Fund was born.

Since issuing its first Emergency Loans in the wake of Hurricane Irene in 2011, the Vermont Farm Fund has:

Deployed over **\$3.5 million in loans** to 155 Vermont farmers and food producers

Supported natural disaster relief and recovery through **52 no-interest Emergency loans**

Helped farm and food businesses grow and innovate through **147 Business Builder loans**

Maintained a default **rate under 2%**

Financed new and beginning farm and food enterprises through **12 New Producer loans**

Grown the value of the Fund, and our lending capacity, from **\$135,000 to nearly \$1.5 million**, almost entirely through grassroots support!



“ We had a tragic fire at Small Axe Farm that destroyed our wash/pack building and shop. The Vermont Farm Fund was a critical piece of our farm rebuilding and being able to be functional again the very next season. The people that we worked with at VFF made the process so smooth and simple. We are so thankful that this organization exists. ”

— SMALL AXE FARM

An Emergency Loan allowed Small Axe Farm to rebuild quickly after a devastating fire destroyed their barn and greenhouse (Photo: Small Axe Farm)

2012 LOCAL PRODUCE TO SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

The CAE Farm-to-Institution Program began in 2012. Its initial projects were co-packing arrangements in which local farms contracted with the VFVC to minimally process and package their produce for the wholesale market. This gave local farms the opportunity to produce new value-added products that they in turn sold and delivered directly to institutions and other wholesale buyers. As interest for these products increased and more farms employed the program's services, CAE sought new ways to streamline and improve the experience for both producers and buyers. In 2015, the CAE Farm-to-Institution Program formally changed to Just Cut, which in addition to maintaining its role as food processor also became the sole distributor – sales and delivery – of these goods.

“Just cut is offering something that is really needed across our country to think about how we can have that food system be a complete circle”

— EMILY MACLURE CO-OWNER OF THE CRAFTSBURY GENERAL STORE

This shift allowed Just Cut to expand its reach to larger institutions and to strategize with farmers on the best crops to grow to efficiently meet this increased demand. To date, Just Cut's diced, shredded, and whole peeled cuts of fresh and frozen produce have been served in many of Vermont and NH anchor institutions, as well as at local school districts, camps, delis, and more. We couldn't have done this without long-standing relationships with our good faith agreement farmers and the hard work of our amazing Just Cut team.

Just Cut by the numbers from 2013-2023:

2,761,259

servings of local produce to regional institutions

\$625,000

of produce purchased from local farms

Left: CAE staff in 2011 with an early prototype of packaged vegetables for institutions (Photo: CAE Staff)
Right: Just Cut staff process potatoes in 2023 (Photo: Eat Vermont!)



2022

2020

2018

2016

2014

2012

2010

2008

2006

2004

2023

2021

2019

2017

2015

2013

2011

2009

2007

2005

2003

2014 DEEP COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

GROW YOUR OWN - COMMUNITY FOOD INDEPENDENCE: Driven by its mission to increase food security for everyone, CAE began partnering with the Hardwick Area Food Pantry (HAFP). By 2009 the two organizations created the Food Access Fund to cover the costs of stocking the shelves with local products. The win-win approach ensured farmers a fair price for their product, and pantry guests an increase in local food options. In 2014, HAFP manager Ruby Baker saw that people had an interest in having more ownership over their food choices and learning new skills around food preparation. With the support of CAE and an Innovations and Collaborations grant from the Vermont Community Foundation, Grow Your Own was born. With a goal of increasing community food independence and well-being through shared knowledge, skills and experience, the first class topics included gardening, cooking, and preserving food.

Over the past 10 years the program has grown and expanded. Grow Your Own uses a grassroots community organizing approach, and is led by an 8-person steering committee. The hands-on workshops are taught by community members, offer free childcare, and include a shared meal. Topics have included everything from wild edibles, dumpling making, fermentation and bread baking, to cheese making, breaking down a whole chicken, and how to make easy (and inexpensive) crockpot dinners. Other partnerships with the Hardwick Area Food Pantry include the annual Pies for People project, Produce to Pantries (an updated version of the Food Access Fund), and providing food storage and logistics support for the pantry.

Grow Your Own By the Numbers 2014-2024:

5+ towns where workshops are offered

200+ members, who help shape the program

88 workshops over 10 years (!) averaging 13 people each

Left: Grow Your Own chicken workshop at the Vermont Food Venture Center in 2015 (Photo: CAE Staff). Right: Grow Your Own cheese making with fresh herbs workshop at Atkins Field in 2024 (Photo: Isabel Villarroel)



2014 SUPPORTING THE FOOD WEB

When the Vermont Food Venture Center (VFVC) opened in 2011, CAE partnered with the VT Small Business Development Center to provide business advising for food business clients and NEK focused clients. In 2014, CAE used foundation funding to bring the advising program in-house, and expand the role to support farmers as well. CAE hired a farm and food business planner to provide robust technical assistance and business planning to farmers and food businesses. Over the years, the team has worked with clients on everything from business planning to recipe development. Their support meets business where they are at and helps them reach their individual goals.

2014-2024 Farm & Food Business Resources Achievements:

218 Food business initial consultations

14 "Meet the Maker" marketing videos created for clients

20+ Hosted workshops ranging from food safety and marketing to Quickbooks

3 Business classes co-created and taught with the Center for Women and Enterprise

12 Food business off-site facility assessments

145 Farm businesses supported with technical assistance

98 of those clients were enrolled in the Farm and Forest Viability program, a multi-year commitment to work on their business with our team. This translates to roughly 11 new clients per year

Dairy cows at Maple Lane Farm in 2023 (Photo: Kelly Bogel Stokes)



2022

2020

2018

2016

2014

2012

2010

2008

2006

2004

2023

2021

2019

2017

2015

2013

2011

2009

2007

2005

2003

2015 LISTENING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

In 2015, CAE began a listening campaign designed to uncover some of the larger challenges around food access, equity, and independence in our local community. The team spent a year learning from community members, low-income neighbors, and faith-based communities - what is it that challenges us as a people in rural VT?

The results varied and led CAE to realize that food equity and access are intertwined with other issues, such as transportation, livable wages, childcare, opiate addiction, and generational poverty. The initial campaign was renamed Northeast Kingdom Organizing (NEKO) in 2018 and became a regional network of partners who believe that working across sectors and groups is a critical approach to successfully addressing our issues of rural poverty and food insecurity. NEKO is now a multi-issue, member-led, coalition of individuals, families, faith and community-based organizations that come together to organize and advocate for justice for the people and the places of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. NEKO does this by embracing the concepts and practices of community organizing and centering the voices of NEK residents often ignored in decisions about their communities.

In January 2020, NEKO became its own nonprofit organization though CAE is still a founding member and active partner in the work. A number of our Community Connections team actively engage with NEKO. Community projects range from housing and transportation campaigns, the creation of a community center and food pantry in Barton, and for the past two summers, mucking out houses and providing flood relief to our communities. CAE has actively incorporated community organizing principles into the organization and they have become a critical part of how CAE approaches its work.

“ I organize because I think my neighbors here in the NEK are experts in their own experiences and are a vast, untapped power. ”

— ALLY HOWELL, CAE'S FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ORGANIZER

Left: NEKO members spreading love and representing at the Barton 4th of July parade in 2024 (Photo: Audrey Grant) Right: NEKO Issues Assembly, and organizing summit in 2019 (Photo: CAE Staff)



2016 CULTIVATING CONNECTION

In 2016, partnerships with schools were formalized when CAE hired a Place-Based Education Coordinator to work within the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) district. This new role was a way to co-create programming with school and community to integrate meaningful place-based learning into our rural education system, grounded in partnerships with local schools, community members, youth, land, and food. We focus on cultivating school-community connectivity and on supporting collaborative, youth-centered programming that nurtures curiosity, connection, and a love of place in the young people of the Hardwick area. From gardening with elementary school students, to community meals hosted by teens, to supporting the development of a community school model, the Place-Based Education program works toward a vision of rural education with schools at the center of community well-being, and young people at the center of schools.

Harmony Peets is a perfect example of a student whose experience with community engagement opportunities through CAE deeply shaped their life. With her dad, Josh, Harmony became an Atkins community gardener and youth leader of Grow Your Own workshops while in elementary school. She went on to join the Recipe for Human Connection class (a collaboration between CAE, Hazen Union, and community partners), and helped with community meals as a ninth grader. Harmony also designed an employment opportunity with Hazen Union High School and CAE to provide summer care for Hazen's greenhouse.

“ Food is like a mutual friend. Everybody has a connection to food and that helps us connect to each other. ”

— COLTON COURTEMANCHE, 2021 RECIPE FOR HUMAN CONNECTION STUDENT

4th grade students from Hardwick Elementary School glean bok choy on a field trip to Pete's Greens in 2015
Photo: Bethany Dunbar (Photo CAE Staff)



2022

2020

2018

2016

2014

2012

2010

2008

2006

2004

2023

2021

2019

2017

2015

2013

2011

2009

2007

2005

2003

“ Recipe for Human Connection teaches you a lot about communication skills with others and even really with yourself. The community lunches are a good time to connect with elders and adults as well as peers who are there with you. You get to know each other better. The Grow Your Own and job experiences have been really good, and I realized how much I enjoy working with kids. Now I have a job at the Hardwick elementary preschool. All of that stuff has helped me get to where I am today and who I am. I’m very grateful for all of it. I’m a lot better than where I was a couple of years ago - I can actually go through a full day of school and get through it without arguing with somebody. Understanding myself and how to deal with my emotions - that was a really big part. ”

— HARMONEY PEETS

Josh and Harmony Peets teach the Grow Your Own workshop Smoothies, Dips, and Healthy Snacks in 2020 at Atkins Field (Photo: Kent Shaw)



2019 A VITAL LINK IN THE FOOD CHAIN

Farm Connex, was started in 2002 by Don Maynard, as a farm product and food delivery service. Most food in Vermont is shipped by distribution companies that buy the food from producers and resell it to retail outlets. Farm Connex is unique in that it operates only as a delivery service for small and medium farms and food businesses that might otherwise not have a way to get their products to market. In 2018 Farm Connex worked with CAE for business advising, and during that process Mr. Maynard realized he was ready to sell or end the service. However, none of his clients were in the position to take back the delivery of their products, and they couldn't find a buyer for the business. CAE heard the demand for this critical link in the local food supply chain and as a nonprofit was uniquely positioned to maintain the service in a way that would not be possible if profit margin was the only measure of success. At the time CAE took over the service at the end of 2019, it served over 60 farmers and 3 cooperative and institution partners, moving \$3.5 million dollars worth of food a year.

Value of food moved from 2019-2023:

\$3.5 million (2019)

\$12.3 million (2022)

\$13 million (2023)

In the four years CAE has operated Farm Connex it has continued to be a critical resource. With industry consolidations there are fewer distribution options, and many of those won't service smaller businesses down dirt roads with small quantities of product. The Covid-19 pandemic saw Farm Connex weave together market access and food access by delivering ShiftMeals and expanding services for local food pantries. In 2025, Farm Connex will move and operate out of CAE's new Food Hub.

Left: CAE Staff and Farm Connex team with cases of Strafford milk ready for delivery in 2022 (Photo: Laura Hardie)
 Right: Don Maynard delivers local food to the newly built Vermont Food Venture Center in 2011 (Photo: CAE Staff)





2023

2021

2019

2017

2015

2013

2011

2009

2007

2005

2003

2020-2023 SUPPORT WHEN IT'S NEEDED

The Covid-19 pandemic established CAE as an important resource for farmers and community members in times of emergency. We know that the pandemic simply compounded needs that already existed in our communities. As a result, our communities, including CAE, began to get creative and think outside the box to support each other. CAE stepped up in many ways, from adapting our Place-Based-Education work to remote learning and sending care packages of seeds to students, to pivoting our Just Cut Team to pack boxes for the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

GRANTS FOR FARMERS: CAE supported 58 farms with \$500 micro-grants to support their response to Covid-19. Local farms are uniquely positioned to feed their communities, and these grants helped put infrastructure in place to get food directly to Vermonters. For some this meant buying new freezers for their farm stores, for others it meant going digital and opening online stores.

EVERYONE EATS MEAL PROGRAM: In Spring of 2020, CAE mobilized grant funds to pay restaurants for take-away meals that were made available to community members each week at no cost. We recruited volunteers to manage reservations and organize deliveries. The restaurants were reimbursed at \$10 per meal, more than three times the standard reimbursement rate for charitable meals, and were required to purchase a percentage of ingredients from local farms and producers. In the second half of the year this grew into the statewide Vermont Everyone Eats program, with 14 community hubs organizing meal sites across Vermont. From the start of the pandemic through then end of the program in 2022, the CAE hub served over 79,600 meals, which resulted in roughly \$796,360 to local restaurants and over \$230,400 to local farms and food producers.

GROCERY VOUCHERS: CAE started a grocery voucher program to complement the Hardwick Area Food Pantries emergency services. From 2020 - 2022 more than \$50,000 went into the community through \$50 vouchers to six local markets in the region, giving recipients the autonomy to purchase food that fit their needs from local stores. In 2020 Farm Connex delivered over 65,000 ShiftMeals to frontline workers statewide.

PRODUCE TO PANTRIES: In 2021, the Produce to Pantries program was started as a local alternative to the USDA food box program of 2020. Grants allow the Hardwick Area Food Pantry to purchase from small local farms to increase the amount of produce available to clients. Through this program the three pantry sites are able to offer their clients 1,149 lbs. of local produce weekly, and \$50,000 is spent annually at local farms.

“Of all of the Cares Act stimulus and aid, I would rate the Everyone Eats program to be the most beneficial to our business, to the local farmers, and to our community. It is a resoundingly successful program and did more to keep my employees retained than the PPP program.”

— TOBIN PORTER, OWNER OF FRONT SEAT COFFEE

2023 IMPACT REPORT

Cultivating Community and Mutual Aid

2023 presented CAE with unanticipated challenges, the largest of which was devastating flooding in early July. This flooding disrupted normal day-to-day activities and necessitated a shift in overall focus and priorities and changed the trajectory of the organization's work for the remainder of the year. In the immediate aftermath of the flooding, the strength and importance of our relationships with community partners and our role as a community resource were highlighted and tested. We pivoted much of our work to emergency response efforts to help ensure that both our local community and the larger community of Vermont farmers had their needs met. Although we do not consider ourselves an emergency service organization, we were able to provide some direct relief to both our local and statewide community in the days and weeks following the flood. Our capacity to pursue emergency funding enabled us to provide stipends to our local community gardeners whose gardens were

lost entirely, as well as meal vouchers for use at the Hardwick Farmers Market, supporting both vendors and market goers. In the midst of hardship, last year's floods brought our community together and directed our collective attention to the urgency of the climate crisis and the future of food security in our region. In the years ahead we'll be thinking about the ways the agricultural landscape is changing in Vermont, and how CAE can meet the needs of farmers, food businesses, and the community.

The Hardwick Food Pantry Site Coordinator, Stella James, shared that:

“ Our visitors have dealt with so much trauma from the floods. The financial, physical, emotional, and mental strain on our participants changed the overall tenor of our open hours. I have watched participants with bags of fresh produce, on top of their box of commodity food, walk away feeling more supported by their community. ”

Left: Atkins Field during and directly after the flood on July 10, 2023 (Photo: CAE Staff). Right: Community clean-up at Atkins Field after the flood (Photo: CAE Staff)



2023 Calendar Year Stats

Produce to Pantries purchased over 30,000 pounds of vegetables from very small farms, earning the farms more than **\$40,000** in revenue and providing pantry-goers with high quality, fresh food.

Farm Connex (FX) drove 189,543 miles and moved **\$13,025,000 worth of local product**. Without FX, producers would have collectively driven an estimated 542,642 miles. The FX service resulted in 352,100 miles NOT DRIVEN, a **65% reduction in food miles**.

Just Cut processed **162,023 pounds** of produce which translates to over **460,000 servings** of local produce in institutional settings.

CAE supported getting a combined **11,109 meals** into the community through the Everyone Eats and Emergency Eats programs.

Vermont Farm Fund loaned \$546,500 to Vermont farm and food businesses.

Farm & Food Business Resources supported **11 business plans** and secured **\$170,000** for the Direct Farm Grant Program.

Vermont Food Venture Center business entrepreneurs rented **1,406 hours** of kitchen time.

Vermont food Businesses, including Farm Connex, meet with legislators at the Taste of Vermont event in Washington, DC in 2023 (Photo: Meryl Friets)



FLOOD RECOVERY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN 2023 CAE:

48 hours after flood Farm Connex resumed delivery service

\$30,000+ provided in grocery & meal vouchers for individuals and families

\$400,000+ raised for Vermont Farm Fund Emergency Loans

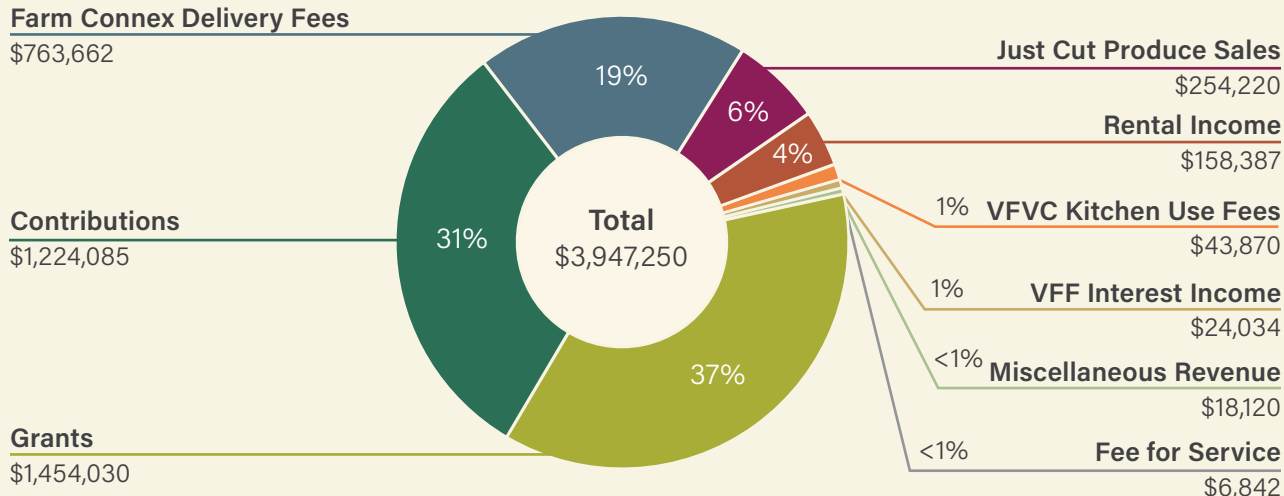
\$13 million in local food and farm products delivered to markets for producers this year through Farm Connex

700 free prepared meals provided weekly at CAE through the Every One Eats program

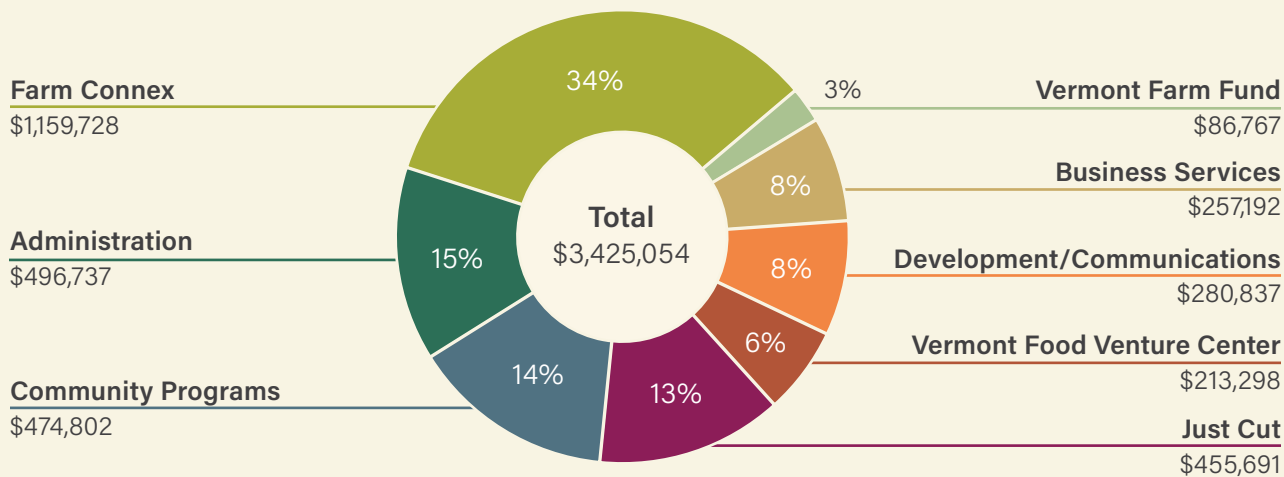
1,100 students of the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union school district reached through CAE's continued presence to facilitate opportunities for community engagement, collaboration, and connection to place

2023 FINANCIAL REPORT

REVENUE BY CATEGORY

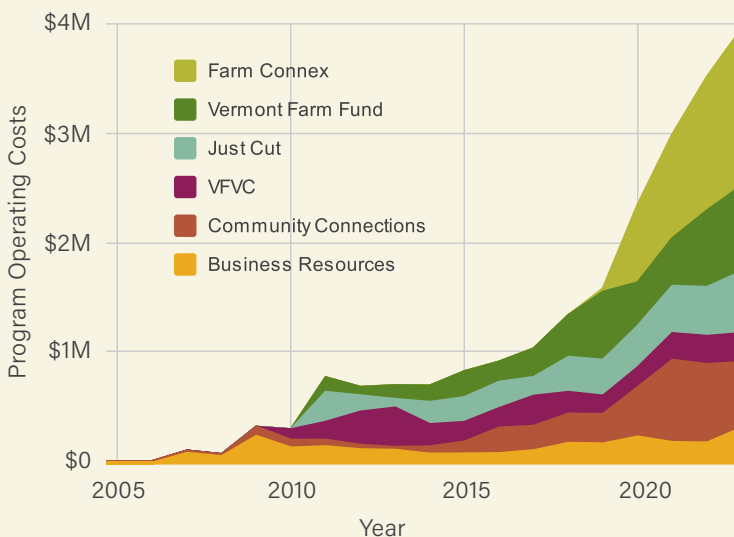


EXPENSES BY PROGRAM



HOW CAE PROGRAMS HAVE GROWN OVER THE YEARS:

As the number of programs have grown at CAE over the years so has the investment CAE makes in each of them, as illustrated in the adjacent graph. These investments are wide ranging, and include everything from vehicle repairs and produce purchasing to food for community meals. Some of CAE's programs generate revenue from services or sales, but all programs rely on grant funds.



2024 A NEW LOOK AND A NEW BUILDING



Center for an
**Agricultural
Economy**

**COMMUNITY
CONNECTIONS**

FARM CONNEX

**FARM & FOOD BUSINESS
RESOURCES**

JUST CUT

**VERMONT
FARM FUND**

ATKINS FIELD

FOOD HUB

**VERMONT FOOD
VENTURE CENTER**

New Look!

Since its founding, CAE has undergone many transformations and iterations. Because of our commitment to a just, accessible, vibrant, and sustainable food system, our communication efforts have been secondary to the work on behalf of our communities. After more than doubling our operational budget and program scope in the past four years, we found ourselves at a critical point that required updates and changes to our communications strategy and implementation. We have employed a local design firm (shout out to Peltz Creative!) to help us refine the way we understand and communicate the entire CAE ecosystem: our mission, vision, values, programs, partners, projects and impact on the communities we serve. We're proud to be stepping into our 20th year with a new brand!

New Building!

CAE's new Food Hub at the Hardwick Yellow Barn complex stands to amplify CAE's capacity to serve the region. This project will bring us into balance with our existing programming, provide room to grow and serve additional partners and food producers, and will be a resource in times of crisis. As a net-zero building, the Food Hub aligns CAE's commitment to sustainability and demonstrates that agriculture can work in concert with environmental initiatives.

New URL: caevt.org

And stay tuned for our new website coming in 2025!



Construction of the Food Hub at the Yellow Barn Complex, June 26, 2024 (Photo: Kelly Bogel Stokes)

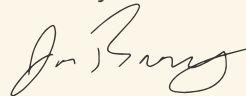
LOOKING AHEAD, 2024 AND BEYOND

Over the last 20 years our collective work has made significant strides increasing the accessibility and availability of local food. We have seen many more farm and food businesses start and grow their operations. Students are innovating and creating community connections by preparing meals. More voices are at the table and the local food system is intersecting with many more people in our communities. This has and will continue to be a critical part of CAE's work going forward.

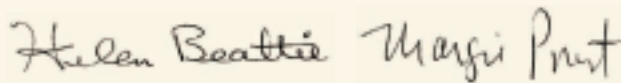
At CAE we are also investing in climate-resilient infrastructure that both reduces the impact on our environment and grows our rural food economy. CAE's shared-use infrastructure also reduces the need for individual on-farm investments, increasing market access for all food producers and lowering barriers for new producers to participate in the local food economy. In the coming years, CAE's work will support over \$20 million annually in economic impact for our rural communities. Our work helps sustain hundreds of jobs and over 10,000 acres of working lands and will continue to increase access and strengthen food security for all. CAE partners with amazing people, schools, students, and organizations that make up our communities. Deepening these relationships makes us stronger together in moments of crisis and emergency. How we deploy our collective capacity will require coordination and work to identify what communities need. Working together means our communities can rebound faster and build back with more resilience. These partnerships strengthen our collective voices

to advocate for resources and policies that make our communities stronger. We are so thankful to the farms, food producers, community members, partners, and funders who support our work. There is an enormous amount of work ahead of us in the next 20 years and much to celebrate from the last 20.

Thank you,



Jon Ramsay
Executive Director



Helen Beattie and Margie Prevot,
Board of Directors Co-Chairs



Wolcott Elementary School 8th annual all school fall garden workday in 2023 (Photo: Reeve Basom)

THANK YOU

We are proud of all we have achieved and learned together in 20 years, and look forward to all that is to come.

To our Farm and Food Business Partners: Thank you for trusting us, and letting us be a part of your work. You have shared your dreams and hardships with our staff, and we are honored to be your companions in this work. Thank you for the endless time, effort, heart, tears, and joy you put into feeding our community, Vermont, and beyond. We know it isn't easy work, and we are here to go through it with you, and support you along the way.

TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

It's only through partnership with other individuals and organizations who are doing this work that we can move the needle. It takes all of us and continued communication, creativity, and trust to move conversations, projects, and dreams forward. Thank you to the co-creators and weavers of our shared future!

TO OUR VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORTERS:

Thank you to the diverse and passionate people who make up CAE's supporters. Your partnership and trust are the foundation of our success. The challenges of the past few years are surpassed only by the ways that our supporters have shown up for CAE, for farms, and for each other.

WAYS TO SUPPORT CAE

MAKE A DONATION ONLINE.

As a community-based nonprofit, we rely on both your voices and your donations to keep our programs running year after year.



CONSIDER A RECURRING GIFT.

Monthly gifts of every size can have a great impact towards our mission.

GIFTS OF STOCK.

Direct gifts of stock to CAE are sold on receipt and are put to use right away.

SHARE YOUR ENTHUSIASM WITH A FRIEND!

You are the best qualified person to speak to why a vibrant, community-based food economy matters to you.

SUPPORT OUR PARTNERS.

We cannot do what we do without an amazing network of community-based partners who also operate in the greater Hardwick region.

MAKE A LASTING LEGACY.

Long-term systems change means that by nature, we are planning and working for impacts that are generations in the making. By remembering CAE in your will or estate planning, your memory will keep working towards a vibrant and equitable food system, rooted in thriving rural communities. A clear, early directive helps your family understand your wishes, and thoughtful planning can prevent tax burdens for your loved ones. Let us know if you are planning to make a gift by reaching out to Becca Jordan at Rebecca@caevt.org.





**Center for an
Agricultural
Economy**

POST OFFICE BOX 422
HARDWICK, VERMONT 05843

“ I support CAE because their work gives me hope for a thriving, sustainable economy based on agriculture here in Vermont. I appreciate the focus on justice, equity, and community that they bring to their work. ”

- A CAE SUPPORTER

