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## **New Farmer Resource Coordination Advisory Report**

Prepared for the Vermont State Legislature  
January 2023

Prepared by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets



**CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION ..... 3**

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS ..... 5**

**NEW FARMER RESOURCES INVENTORY ..... 6**

**CURRENT CONDITIONS..... 7**

**RECOMMENDATIONS..... 9**

**CONCLUSION ..... 11**

**APPENDIX 1: PROGRAMS FOR NEW FARMERS..... 12**

**APPENDIX 2: LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED..... 15**

**APPENDIX 3: STAKEHOLDER SURVEY RESULTS ..... 16**

**APPENDIX 4: STAGES OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ..... 28**

# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE

As part of Act 185 enacted in 2022, the Legislature directed the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to issue a report with recommendations on programs and services for new farmers:

*“The Secretary of Agriculture shall, in consultation with the Vermont Housing Conservation Board, inventory the programs available to assist new farmers beginning operations in the State. On or before January 15, 2023, the Secretary shall provide a report to the House and Senate Committees on Agriculture on the degree of coordination across these programs. This shall include recommendations for improvement or change in operations and coordination that would benefit new farmers experience in seeking assistance.”*

This report is prepared with the intention to understand how Vermont can convene its resources to better serve aspiring and new farmers. The report focuses on the existing programs available to new farmers and the degree of coordination across these programs. The report presents recommendations to enhance the network of support for new farmers to get started in Vermont.

## DEFINITIONS

1. **Farmers:** For the purposes of this report, we are providing the following definitions for different stages of farm business development. This report primarily focuses on the needs of new and aspiring farmers, rather than beginning farmers that have been in business for more than five years. Many of our state’s services for farmers are geared towards commercial businesses; however, those growing on a homestead scale or for educational, therapeutic, or other non-commercial purposes also contribute to a vibrant agricultural landscape. Many of the recommendations included in this report are applicable to farmers at all stages and scales.
  - a. **Aspiring Farmer** – This is a farm in the Pre-Venture or Seed Stage of development. Planning, research, and land access are typically primary activities at this stage.
  - b. **New Farmer** – This term is broad and not consistently defined across contexts. In this report, we use the term to signify a farmer that is in the first few years of operation and has been in business for around five or fewer years.
  - c. **Beginning Farmer** – This term is defined by many USDA programs as someone who has operated a farm for no more than ten years.

## 2. Service Providers:

- a. **Business Planning Assistance** - Business assistance service providers work with farmers to build business plans, identify, and secure appropriate capital, assess capital expenditures and equipment needs, plan for business succession, and strengthen their personnel and project management skills.
- b. **Technical Assistance** - Technical assistance service providers offer a range of support services, from agronomic research to food safety planning, marketing, land and capital access, engineering, and permitting support, animal health and nutrition consultations, conservation planning, water quality and nutrient management assessments, and equipment optimization support.

## BACKGROUND

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFMM) facilitates, supports, and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment. To support the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont, new farmers must be supported. According to the 2021–2030 Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan, “State and national trends show an aging farmer population, increased land pressure for non-agricultural uses, and a rapidly changing marketplace for agricultural goods”. The Plan’s [Supporting Future Farmers Brief](#) outlines the structural issues facing new farmers below:

*“The current and future generation of Vermont farmers face a number of significant challenges, including limited markets for local products, increasing land values, increasing production uncertainties due to climate change, and evolving agricultural business models. In addition, starting and growing a farm operation has become increasingly capital intensive in terms of both operating expenses and land purchase. All of these factors combine to make for a very challenging environment for farmers to be successful.”*

Building successful new farm enterprises is uniquely challenging for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). The Plan’s [Racial Equity in the Vermont Food System Brief](#) notes these racial injustices below:

*“To establish and grow a farm business requires affordable farmland, access to business networks (e.g., service providers and purchasing managers), flexible capital, and more (see Supporting Future Farmers brief). BIPOC farmers may face challenges accessing these resources due to bias, language and cultural barriers, loan refusals, and other aspects of structural racism.”*

Specific ways that BIPOC farmers face disproportionate challenges in developing farm businesses are noted in the Brief: “(1) Many BIPOC farmers are young, beginning farmers renting small parcels and do not own farmland or have a farming background. (2) BIPOC may not have access to personal savings, conventional agricultural credit, or alternative capital. (3) The diverse aspirations, needs, and strengths of BIPOC farmers may not be well understood by service providers and

policymakers. (4) Farm services and support do not always reach BIPOC farmers and may not be well-matched to their needs.”

In this challenging environment, a supportive business, technical, and financial assistance network is needed for aspiring and new farmers to access and keep land in production and support a strong regional foodshed for generations to come. Vermont is in many ways a leader nationally in the breadth and depth of services available to farms of all sizes and stages of development. One area for improvement for the service provider community is to better coordinate these services so that the network of support for new farmers is easier to navigate.

The Vermont State Legislature directed VAAFM to prepare this report in response to feedback from new farmer constituents that new farmers were confused about how to navigate the existing services and didn't know where to start. This report focuses on the service provider organizations that provide business planning and production technical assistance services to help aspiring and new farmers get started and get connected with the resources and programs to help them succeed in their enterprises.

Implementing the recommendations in this report can help increase equitable access to important information and resources to support new and aspiring farmer business development. Implementing these recommendations will clarify what services are available to new farmers so that new farmers are matched with the programs and organizations to support their growth and developments most effectively.

The recommendations in this report do not address the fundamental underlying structural issues that make it difficult for many farm owners, farm workers, and farm families to thrive. Some of these structural issues include access to affordable land, housing, healthcare, and childcare; access to personal savings, conventional credit, or alternative capital; climate change; and systemic racism, sexism, and heterosexism. These fundamental factors highlight that farming can be especially challenging for people holding minority or marginalized identities.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This report was prepared by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, led by Gina Clithero and Abbey Willard, with consultation from Liz Gleason and Calley Hastings at the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. The report was developed with the support of dozens of stakeholders who volunteered their time to meetings and participating in a survey. Additional VAAFM staff including Kim Burns, Sonia Howlett, Melissa Moon, Clare Salerno, Julia Scheier, and Terry Smith supported the compilation of programs and resources for new and beginning farmers for the [New and Beginning Farmer Webpage](#).

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS**

VAAFM and VHCB facilitated a stakeholder engagement process to solicit input from new farmers and service providers. There were multiple opportunities for individuals to engage in the process. A stakeholder survey was developed and disseminated across the state. Two stakeholder advisory meetings were held with key organizations and individuals serving new and beginning farmers in Vermont in October and November 2022. A session was hosted at

the Vermont Farm to Plate 2022 Annual Network Gathering to solicit perspectives from a broader group, and approximately twenty individuals attended. Additionally, several organizations were engaged in developing the inventory of services and resources for new farmers for the VAAFM New and Beginning Farmer webpage.

Of the twenty-six individuals that participated in the advisory committee, two were new farmers, two were service providers who also owned and operated their own new farm businesses, and twenty-two were service providers that work with new and beginning farmers. The list of all stakeholders that engaged in the advisory committee is included in this report appendix. In total, the service providers that engaged in the process served approximately 340 new and beginning farmers from September 2021 to September 2022. Attempts were made to engage more new farmers in the advisory committee, but it was difficult to engage farmers without a mechanism for compensating them for their time, especially during busy harvest season. Unfortunately, VAAFM did not have the resources to distribute stipends or other compensation to the individuals that provided input on the process. In future public engagement processes, VAAFM hopes to have a budget and an established process to compensate stakeholders for their time to equitably bring more voices to the table.

Outreach methods to solicit advisory committee members and stakeholder survey responses included developing a list of the core service provider organizations serving new farmers and contacting those individuals directly; pushing out the message to the University of Vermont (UVM) New Farmer Project email listserv, the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Newsletter, and the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability service provider network; contacting leadership in the Vermont Releaf Collective; contacting prior panelists from a Beginning Farmer Panel hosted by the Governor's Commission on the Future of Agriculture in Vermont; and requesting that service providers from the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) and the Intervale Center refer new farmers that they work with to engage with the advisory committee.

## **NEW FARMER RESOURCES INVENTORY**

VAAFM developed an inventory of the key services and programs serving new and beginning farmers. The inventory has two parts: (1) a list of the organizations that participated in the stakeholder advisory committee with a description of the services they provide new farmers and (2) a [New and Beginning Farmer page](#) created on the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets website with a more comprehensive list of the services and programs that will be useful to new farmers.

1. The list of organizations that participated in the stakeholder advisory committee is in the appendix. This list was generated primarily by the advisory committee members in their responses to the stakeholder survey.
2. The resources on the webpage were assembled by a project team of VAAFM staff. The team solicited input from all Agency staff, asking people to write in what questions they are frequently asked from new farmers, and if possible, what guidance or resources they have directed new farmers to. The team compiled this feedback, conducted research about what resources and programs are available, and assembled and organized resources in a shared document under major headers

including Land Access, Business Planning, and Product-Specific Regulatory Contacts. This document was circulated internally for additional feedback, and then shared with sixteen organizations that were represented in the draft webpage content to confirm that we represented their work accurately and solicit their final feedback on any other resources to add to the list. The webpage was published on November 9, 2022

## **CURRENT CONDITIONS**

Vermont is unique in the depth and breadth of services and supports available to farm, forestry, and food businesses. There is a robust network of service providers that provide a range of services to assist aspiring, new, and beginning farmers. These services include facilitating new farmer access to technical and production information, capital, land, markets, and community support.

When asked about the degree of coordination across these service provider organizations, stakeholders emphasized that there are many organizations providing excellent services to new farmers, but that the network could be more coordinated and easier to navigate for new and aspiring farmers.

Responses from stakeholders to illustrate this point are offered below:

- *“Brand new farmers can get lost in the myriad of service providers and not know who to contact or who to start with.”*
- *“Part of the issue is coordination, there are many different but closely linked partner organizations. Some of which do not have actual capital to lend or grant but are an important part of the support mechanism for farmers, like Extension and Conservation Districts. It is very easy for farmers, new and established, to get confused, partly because their daily focus is a list of things that have to be completed on that particular day.”*
- *“There are plenty of resources. But like economic development, [it's] siloed and there is a lack of coordination.”*
- *“I think there are many resources for new and beginning farmers in Vermont, and many of the farmers who reach out to me are not aware of them.”*

Respondents reported that the network becomes much easier to navigate once a farmer can get in touch with specific service providers within the network who can make effective referrals to the appropriate financial and technical assistance both within and beyond their organization.

The network is not uniformly connected and convened. Some organizations work more closely together than others. For example, three organizations (Vermont Land Trust, Intervale Center, Land for Good) focused on beginning farmers and land access meet monthly to connect on clients that they all serve. UVM Extension and USDA FSA Beginning Farmer Coordinator are meeting regularly on a new farmer resource directory project. The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program regularly convenes service providers from across the state but does not focus on aspiring farmers or new farmers in the first two years of

business. Service providers expressed interest in building stronger working relationships with other organizations. Several remarked that the two advisory committee meetings associated with this legislative mandate were a step in the right direction towards developing and deepening these relationships.

## **EXAMPLES OF COORDINATION AMONG SERVICE PROVIDERS**

### **1. UVM Extension New Farmer Project**

University of Vermont Extension New Farmer Project is dedicated to facilitating access to technical assistance and education for new farmers in Vermont. The project offers a website with resources and tools, educational programming, and contact information for UVM Extension technical assistance and business planning assistance. UVM Extension is also currently developing an online [New Farmer Resource Directory](#).

Between 2004 and 2014 there was support (at varying levels) through state funds and federal grant programs to support UVM Extension to provide statewide coordination among the various organizations and agencies that provide services and programs for aspiring, new and beginning farmers. These services included a new farmer network, resource guide, and listserv for new and aspiring farmers. Such capacity/coordinating funding and services has not been consistently available to UVM Extension since 2014.

### **2. Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program**

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) offers business advising to eligible farmers, agriculturally related businesses, forest products enterprises, and forest landowners. These services are carried out by a robust network of advisers contracted by VHCB, and VHCB provides a central organizing role including enrolling farmers, matching them with the best fit adviser for their needs, and providing professional development to the network of advisers. The Farm & Forest Viability Program offers a unique model and a success story of coordinating service providers to serve farms, but the eligibility criteria to enroll in the program excludes aspiring and new farmers that do not have at least two years' experience managing a farm and at least \$15,000 in gross sales in the most recent tax year.

### **3. Vermont Farm to Plate Network: Stages of Business Development**

In 2019–2021, the Vermont Farm to Plate Network made concerted efforts to clarify which service providers are best suited to serve farm businesses based on their size and stage of development. The result of this effort is a diagram published in the 2021–2030 Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan [Business Planning and Technical Assistance Issue Brief](#) listing organizations on a continuum of business development, from pre-venture to mature. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund built from this tool to create a searchable [partner directory](#), which allows a business to indicate their product category and stage of development to get matched with an appropriate service provider. These tools represent an important effort to clarify which organizations are best suited to serve aspiring and new farmers versus those designed for more established or mature businesses. For more information on [stages of business development](#), see Appendix 4.



#### 4. Resource Directories

Many organizations have developed guides and resource directories. Several notable directories and guides are listed below. These directories and guides have been developed based on varying levels of coordination and communication between service providers that serve new farmers. These tools are an important part of the process for improving new farmer experience navigating and seeking assistance.

Known resource directories listed below (unranked):

- [New Farmer Resources – Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets](#)
- [Beginning Farmer Resource Hub - UVM Extension](#)
- [Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont – Franklin County Natural Resources District](#) (available in print or online PDF)
- [Farmer Resources – Intervale Center](#)
- [Farmer Resources – Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program](#)
- [Farmer Resources – Rural Vermont](#)
- [Farmer Resources – Vital Communities](#)
- [Resource Directory – FarmFirst](#)
- [Food and Farm Financing Inventory – Vermont Farm to Plate Network](#)

#### 5. Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP)

VAWQP is not a partnership specifically focused on support services to new and aspiring farmers, but the VAWQP hosts regular regional and statewide meetings among service providers to present primarily on conservation program offerings. This model serves as an example of extreme effort and commitment to coordination among service providers that results in improved services to the agricultural community.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined in this report center around two primary goals: (1) to **increase clarity** about what services and programs are available for new farmers and (2) to **expand access** to services and programs for all new farmers in Vermont.

The recommendations listed below were developed around the major themes that arose from the stakeholder engagement process. Possible approaches are presented within each theme for how the Vermont State Legislature could address these issues to best support aspiring and new farmers in Vermont. Further development and research is needed to determine the costs of these recommendations, and additionally many of these recommendations need a feasibility period to assess which may be most effective to pursue.

#### 1. Improve communication and collaboration between service providers so that aspiring and new farmers receive excellent and coordinated services.

##### Possible Approaches:

- a. Identify a consistent funding stream to support coordination and professional development for service providers serving aspiring and new farmers. For example, expand the state legislative funding stream to the Vermont Farm

and Forest Viability Program to support coordination of services for new and aspiring farmers.

- b. Engage new farm service providers in further dialogue to determine two to three organizations that are willing to serve as the primary contacts for all new farmers in Vermont. The organizations that might be able to offer this service are the Intervale Center Beginning Farmer Program, NOFA-VT, UVM Extension, or USDA's Beginning Farmer Coordinator.
- c. Identify an entity to host regular meetings among service providers for rotating service providers to present on their program offerings and for service providers to ask questions about those offerings.
- d. Identify other communication methods that might be needed to keep service providers in good communication, such as a listserv.
- e. Recognize complexity in various funding opportunities across numerous organizations and develop recommendations to simplify and streamline application processes, centralize communication, and improve accessibility around funding opportunities and requirements.

## **2. Additional outreach materials and effort focusing on available support and programs targeting aspiring and new farmers.**

### **Possible Approaches:**

- a. Expanded capacity is needed to increase program advertising and to clarify the differences between existing programs. Identify an organization to facilitate coordinated advertising and outreach across organizations and programs to increase awareness of programs and clarify the differences between existing programs.
- b. Coordinate advertising and outreach efforts so that best practices for outreach and advertising for their respective programs are shared among service providers.
- c. Invest in equity and accessibility in outreach methods and materials to reach aspiring and new farmers who don't read or speak English, have limited computer access, hold marginalized identities, or aren't already connected with an existing farm service provider organization. Outreach materials might include multi-lingual and multi-media advertising. Outreach methods might include partnering with organizations serving Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers.
- d. Identify key audiences who may not be as connected to existing services and craft messaging specifically for those farmers, for example targeted messaging to farm employees who want to start their own farm businesses.
- e. Explore re-establishing a centralized network and communication portal or listserv where new and aspiring farmers can connect and share around business needs and valuable services and resources accessed. For example, the UVM Extension New Farmer Network and New Farmer Listserv that was active until 2014.

### **3. Establish additional capacity for direct support to new farmer services within key organizations.**

#### **Possible Approaches:**

- a. Invest in expanded new and beginning farmer services support, potentially through the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability program, to provide organizations long-term funding to retain staff and maintain service offerings. This could also create the opportunity for collaboration amongst service providers serving new farmers to do some long-term shared fundraising and budgeting. The Farm and Forest Viability Program contracts with service providers in key organizations to work one on one with farmers.
- b. Directly increase staff capacity at organizations specifically designed to support new and aspiring famers, such as Viability Program, NOFA-VT, Intervale Center, UVM Extension, and others to expand services and coordination of programs serving new farmers.
- c. Regulatory Navigator: The [Governor's Future of Agriculture Commission 2021 Action Plan](#) recommends that the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets support two navigator positions to assist farm and food businesses streamline their experience with government programs and resources. The core focus of these positions is to exist in organizations that currently engage with local farms and would be well positioned to assist farmers in navigating the regulatory and permit requirements, understanding various program offerings, and help new and established farm businesses navigate the available business, technical, and financial assistance. For example, Natural Resource Conservation Districts are located locally across the state and could be well positioned due to their experience with government programs and resources.

## **CONCLUSION**

Investing in future farmers is one of the most important things the State of Vermont must do to support the viability of Vermont agriculture. This report urges the Vermont State Legislature to identify and invest in an organization or network to standardize practices and processes across farm service providers, coordinate responses to farmer inquiries, share resources, and offer professional development. Investment is also needed to support key organizations directly serving aspiring and new farmers and to expand outreach and communications efforts. The recommendations outlined in this report will improve accountability, clarity, and equity in the delivery of business planning, technical, and financial assistance to new and aspiring farmers.

Further development and research are needed to determine the costs of these recommendations, and additionally many of these recommendations need a feasibility period to assess which may be most effective to pursue.

## APPENDIX 1: PROGRAMS FOR NEW FARMERS

This list represents the core organizations providing educational services to new and beginning farmers in Vermont. This is not an exhaustive list of all organizations serving new farmers, but rather reflects key organizations. These service providers served a combined 350 new and beginning farmers between September 2021 and September 2022. This information was gathered to partially fulfill the legislative request to inventory all programs available to new farmers. The other component to the inventory is the more comprehensive [New Farmer Resources Webpage](#).

SERVICE PROVIDER	SERVICES OFFERED TO NEW FARMERS
<b>Agricultural Service Providers</b>	
University of Vermont (UVM) Extension New Farmer Project	Currently we provide education, coaching, referrals and limited assistance with a focus on the needs of aspiring and start-up farmers. Much of our education recently has been delivered virtually. We work with UVM Extension's Farm Business team to meet the needs of more established beginning farmers.
UVM Extension Center for Sustainable Agriculture	Grazing plans, letters for grant applications, fence/water design, animal system planning, animal health issues, parasite management, connections to other farmers, businesses, etc.
UVM Extension	Information and resources on dairy and livestock care/herd health, grazing and pasture management, support with applications for grant funding (PSWF, BMP, EQIP, FAP, etc.), information about dairy regulations, recommendations to seek business planning support.
Land For Good	We provide one on one consultation with farmers on all aspects of farmland access and tenure. We have a toolbox of resources on the Land For Good website, some ours and some others, for land seekers. We offer workshops and webinars. We make referrals to other service providers and programs as relevant. We also work with the UVM Extension Farm Viability team and do business planning with new and beginner farmers.
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)	Courses available to New Farmers include the Farm Beginnings program, Journey Farmer program, and Farm Dreams workshops. NOFA-VT also offers one-on-one business farmer business coaching services. NOFA-VT also offers Resilience Grants, which are a financial assistance resource available to new and established farmers.
Intervale Center	The Intervale Center Beginning Farmer Program offers information, assistance, and encouragement to beginning and aspiring farmers in the state of Vermont through one-on-one coaching and business planning. Intervale Center can also

	support new farmers with land access planning and hosts the <a href="#">Vermont Land Link</a> match-making tool.
Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board	The Farm and Forest Viability Program matches farms with farm business advisors and coaches to offer in-depth holistic business planning support, financial and other business management assistance, and grants. Aspiring and very new farms (less than two years in business) are not eligible for this program and are referred out to other partners.
Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE)	At CAE we work with farms in all stages of development, from beginning to transitioning. We provide specialized support and business planning assistance to help farmers find new wholesale markets, improve cash flow, refine production systems, and refine personal and professional goals necessary to sustain their farm business. Other services include business planning, access to financing (through the Vermont Farm Fund), and production and processing technical assistance.
Vermont Land Trust	Land access coaching, conservation easement purchasing, land matching, interim land ownership
Natural Resource Conservation Districts	Natural Resource Conservation Districts (NRCs) are non-regulatory entities that work with private landowners, farms, state and federal agencies, and other partner organizations to promote and implement conservation programs. NRCs can help facilitate access to resources for new farmers, especially resources to help new farms adopt conservation practices. NRCs can support farms with grant applications.
<b>Economic Development Service Providers</b>	
Regional Development Corporations	Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) serve as “satellites” of the Department of Economic Development, and they provide local knowledge and facilitate assistance in their communities. RDCs often refer new farmers to experts and programs and facilitate connections to available resources.
Vermont Small Business Development Center	We provide general business advising on all aspects of business from pre-venture through transition/sale/closing including but not limited to financing, cash flow, business plan development, marketing, HR. When working with farmers we often will assist with general business TA and refer to partners such as the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, NOFA-VT, etc., as needed.
<b>Funders</b>	
USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)	Financing programs offered include microloans, beginning farmer loans for land and operating capital, and risk management

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	programs. Referrals to other resources offered by the USDA, the State of Vermont, and various service providers are often provided by email exchanges with new farmers.
Vermont Community Loan Fund	Programs offered include both loans and business assistance. The SPROUT low interest rate program for working lands enterprises is particularly useful for new and beginning farms.
Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA)	Operating loans for livestock, machinery and equipment and limited working capital. Programs can also support farm business ownership, such as through revolving lines of credit and real estate for the purchase of real estate and/or real estate improvements. VEDA can also refinance debt.

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## **APPENDIX 2: STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

- Addison County Economic Development Corporation
  - Fred Kenney
- Center for an Agricultural Economy
  - Daniel Keeney
  - Kristin Blodgett
- Franklin County Natural Resource Conservation District
  - Lauren Weston
- Intervale Center
  - Sam Smith
  - Nikki Lennart
- Land for Good
  - Mike Ghia
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)
  - Jen Miller
  - Megan Browning
- The Flying Buffalo LLC
  - Hazel Adams-Shango
- Union Brook Farm
  - Rose Thackeray
- USDA Farm Service Agency
  - Jill Thomas
  - John Roberts
- University of Vermont Extension
  - Beth Holtzman
  - Kelsie Meehan
  - Amber Reed
- Vermont Community Loan Fund
  - Will Belongia
- Vermont Economic Development Authority
  - Sarah Isham
- Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program
  - Liz Gleason
  - Calley Hastings
  - Jillian Conner
- Vermont Land Trust
  - Maggie Donin
- Vermont Technical College
  - Molly Willard
- Vermont Small Business Development Center
  - Heidi Krantz
- Vermont Young Farmers Coalition
  - Jake Kornfeld
- White River Conservation District
  - Jennifer Byrne

## APPENDIX 3: STAKEHOLDER SURVEY RESULTS

### New Farmer Responses (4 Total)

<p>Have you utilized any new farmer-specific programs/services in the first 10 years of your farming business?  <b>Examples of these programs include, but are not limited to: USDA FSA loans, UVM Extension, NOFA-VT Farm Beginnings, and the Intervale Center Beginning Farmer Program</b></p>
<p>UVM Extension, Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sought FSA loans but did not qualify as a new farm due to business structure.</li> <li>- Participated in NOFA Farm Beginnings.</li> <li>- Working with VLT on land acquisition.</li> <li>- Working with Intervale Center and NOFA on business planning</li> <li>- Have had conversations with Land for Good around farmland access</li> </ul>
<p>NOFA-VT, Land for Good, Intervale Center, CAE, NRCS, UVM Extension New Farmer Project, Hartshorn Farm Farm Immersion Program</p>
<p>NOFA-VT Farm Beginnings, Journey Farmer, Resiliency Grant recipient          Intervale Business Advisor          NRCS Equip Grant recipient</p>

<p><b>What were the most useful financial and technical assistance resources for you as you worked to get your farm established?</b></p>
<p>UVM extension, grants, nracs</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NOFA farm beginnings/ business advising</li> <li>- Intervale center business advising</li> <li>- VLT farmland access support has not yet materialized but we anticipate it being a key piece of secure land tenure.</li> </ul>
<p>We've boot strapped from our own funds this first season. We will receive our first grant from the Hunger Mountain Co-op this year. Moving forward, we're attempting to apply for other grants and continue to work with the organizations and fellow farmers we've been in ongoing contact with.</p>
<p>We have not sought out any loans at this point but have found NOFA-VT and Intervale services invaluable.</p>

<p><b>In general, how difficult was it for you to find programs, services, and resources to help you meet your early farm business goals?</b></p>
<p>medium difficulty</p>
<p>Some services (technical assistance, business planning) have been easy to find and utilize. Other services, mostly lending/ financing, are harder to pin down.</p>
<p>The Pandemic slowed many of our efforts, however, once pressures alleviated and programs began to reopen, it was fairly easy to Google different programs and to apply and receive full or partial scholarships for tuition. Farm Education has been our largest expense this far.</p>
<p>We got involved with NOFA + Intervale before we even began the farm and they have been great about connecting me with other services as the need arises</p>



**Do you feel that the existing network of programs and organizations serving new and beginning farmers in Vermont is easy to navigate, well-coordinated, and sufficiently resourced? Please explain.**

Yes, though we could map out the options better

Compared to other states, I think Vermont seems really on top of this, but even so, I think there is a lot of room for improvement. It seems to me that the service providers know each other well, maybe with the exception of federal agencies, but that network of personal and organizational relationships doesn't necessarily present itself clearly to beginning farmers. Many of the services I've connected with, the connections came from spending time participating in the Farm to Plate network before I started a farm business. Beyond that, there are a few lists of resources floating around the internet that have been somewhat helpful. We have also gotten leads on additional services/ programs by talking with service providers, "Have you talked to X" is a frequent and often helpful question. NOFAs farm beginnings course was helpful in introducing us to a range of programs, though I think it was far from exhaustive. It doesn't seem to be anyone's job to help connect farmers to different opportunities - a case manager of sorts might be really helpful.

I think a Navigator in each of the existing network of programs and organizations is very important. Also, access to land, which can be very challenging without an appropriate amount of both traditional and non-traditional funding sources that have relaxed requirements.

yes NOFA programs brought in a lot of different representatives from the above organizations to expose us to options for support

**What could have improved your experience starting a farm?**

planning

First and foremost, land access has been quite a challenge. Especially trying to find a farm as the real estate market has exploded and mortgage rates are way up. Supports in accessing land have not kept pace with the changing landscape.

Help with the following would still be very valuable:

- Legal assistance on a range of topics including operating agreements, business structures, and land tenure.
- Tax help and bookkeeping help. I'm not sure if these are things I'll need help on in 10 years, but for now, it's a new topic with tons of nuance and potential pitfalls/ missed opportunities.
- Equipment lending/ renting. There are a lot of physical things we need or will need soon to scale up. Being able to access some kind of equipment coop would be valuable to lessen the need to continue to incur debt and invest in capital in the first few seasons where our markets and overall capacity are still being defined.
- Less skepticism would be nice. I understand that service providers and programs don't want to work with folks who aren't serious, but the culture/ tone of "are you sure you know what you're getting into" can be a bit tiresome.

A comprehensive farming resource directory would be a start. However, going through the process of courses, learning about the farm network, and meeting new people and having new experiences around farming was important though challenging at times.

we feel really supported by NOFA + Intervale and the success of our new business can partially be attributed to their work with us

**What can the state of Vermont do to make it easier to start a farm?**

regulation trainings

Improve access to healthcare and childcare.

Improve access to financing for farmland and housing.

Better Subsidize funding of land access and land purchases, especially to BIPOC farmers. Make an effort to provide a 5-year technical and financial support program which can allow enough time and resources to succeed or move on.

we got our land before prices surged in 2020 but i think land access continues to be a non-starter for young farmers

**Service Provider Responses (16 Total)**

**What are some of the frequently asked questions you receive from new and beginning farmers that you communicate with?**

The most frequently asked questions are related to accessing capital and/or land, and where and how to get started. The next set relate to specific technical questions related to crop/livestock production.

Strategies for finding and affording farmland.

How to finance farmland?

What markets are not saturated?

Where do it get the grants....

business structure, land access, access to capital (grants and loans), set up of key infrastructure, timing of leaving off-farm job(s), record-keeping, tax preparation

How do I start a farming operation

What are the production and other limits that trigger regulation

How does land get designated "farm land"

The most frequent questions is: Where can I get grant funding for [fill in the blank]?

Questions about the basics of livestock care.

Questions about the basics of rotational grazing.

Questions about dairy regulations, both raw milk and dairy processing.

How to access land and capital? How do I start a farm business? .....

What money is available to help fund infrastructure build or rebuild? How do I learn more about....? How to get loans? How do I sell my product?

Calley & I will provide these answers via email in advance of the first meeting if that's ok!!

What are options for financing infrastructure after purchasing a farm?

Do you have good lease templates for X/Y/Z scenario?

How close is available real estate to markets?

Where can I find labor, particularly for marketing and value-added processing?

What does FSA do?

How do I apply?

Why does it take so long?

Very often seeking resources for how to start farming - looking for land access.

Basic loan questions - terms, amounts, rates, collateral requirements, etc...
Are there grants to help buy farmland? Where do I find farmland that is for sale? How do I buy a farm property? Who are the best lenders in Vermont?
questions about finances and grants
General understanding of all of the programs/options

<b>What services are you providing new and beginning farmers?</b>
Currently we provide education, coaching, referrals and limited assistance with a focus on the needs of aspiring and start-up farmers. Much of our education recently has been delivered virtually. We work with UVM Extension's Farm Business team to meet the needs of more established beginning farmers.
We provide one on one consultation with farmers on all aspects of farmland access and tenure. We have a toolbox of resources on the Land For Good website, some ours and some others, for land seekers. We offer workshops and webinars. We make referrals to other service providers and programs as relevant. I also work with the UVM Extension Farm Viability team, and do business planning with new and beginner farmers
Farm Beginnings program, Journey Farmer program, Farm Dreams workshops, 1-1 business farmer business coaching services Resilience grants
Referral to experts and programs
Information and resources on dairy and livestock care/herd health, grazing and pasture management, support with applications for grant funding (PSWF, BMP, EQIP, FAP, etc.), information about dairy regulations, recommendations to seek business planning support.
One-on-one business planning and business management coaching. Land access planning. Vermont Land Link.
Grazing plans, letters for grant applications, fence/water design, animal system planning, animal health issues, parasite management, connections to other farmers, businesses, etc.
business planning, access to financing, production and processing TA
Microloans Beginning farmer loans for land and operating capital. Risk management programs
Information usually via email - reference to the various resources the USDA, the State and various service providers may be able to assist them.
Loans and business assistance. Particularly through our SPROUT low interest rate program for working lands enterprises.
Operating loans for livestock, machinery and equipment and limited working capital, revolving lines of credit and real estate (aka farm ownership) for the purchase of real estate and/or real estate improvements. We can also refinance debt.
Land access coaching, conservation easement purchasing, land matching, interim land ownership

We provide general business advising on all aspects of business from pre-venture through transition/sale/closing including but not limited to financing, cash flow, business plan development, marketing, HR. When working with farmers we often will assist with general business TA and refer to partners such as VFFV, NOFA, etc., as needed.
General understanding of all of the programs/options Grant application assistance

<b>Approximately how many new and beginning farmers has your organization served in the past 12 months?</b>
Approximately 40-50, but not all of them are Vermonters.
We work in all 6 New England States. I don't have the data in front of me. Probably a couple hundred around the region and 2-3 dozen in VT.
35-45 How we are actually defining new and beginning farmers?... are we using the USDA definition or thinking of folks before they are ready to enter the Farm Viability program (which for high capacity managers can be as early as 3-4 years in business)
5-6
I've worked with about 20 new/beginning farmers in the past 12 months one-on-one, plus additional farmers who have attended workshops I've hosted. I do not know how many new/beginning farmers UVM Extension as a whole has worked with in the past 12 months.
80
At least 50
depending on the definition of 'new and beginning' and 'served', 10-15
Jill Thomas will have the numbers
The "served" question is very broad we will have to discuss this more in our meetings.
10
Approximately 5-6. We can finance start ups but more often work with farmers who have already gotten established.
50
I don't have a statewide answer, but will research this. We do tend to work more with people developing a value-added product.
1

<b>In your work with new and beginning farmers, what has been working well?</b>
I'll have to come back to this.
We have a good network of providers here in VT that collaborate and communicate well who can help new and beginning farmers with the major needs of beginner farmers: 1) Access to technical information; 2) Access to capital; 3) Access to Land; 4) Access to Markets; 5) Access to Community support.

cohort-based education, facilitation of farmer-to-farmer learning, teaching core business management strategies in a group setting, pairing 1-1 business coaching to supplement cohort learning
Referral to experts and programs
Farm visits, referrals to other programs and resources.
There are lots of new and beginning farms who are eager to get started on the land. They often engage very enthusiastically to start building their production and business management skills.
Full pasture designs, offering pasture walks, helping direct people to funds for infrastructure
A long way to go but attending meetings and finding out who they are and what situation they are comfortable meeting in.
As the BFR coordinator a goal has been updated the resource guide that is very outdated - UVM extension is creating a very user friendly web page we are providing support in that project.
Most understand the need for capital to make larger investments like hoop houses or equipment purchases.
We have very experienced loan officers who are committed to new and beginning farmers and very adept at analyzing their applications and business plans.
In depth farm property matching, using conservation easements to help make farms more affordable, collaborative farm business support in coordination with the farm viability network, purchasing farms as an interim owner to create an easier path to land ownership for someone
General business advising

<b>Are there individuals that your program can't/doesn't reach? Is there unmet need for the services your organization provides? If so, what are the financial and/or staff capacity limitations that r...</b>
Definitely! We have financial and staff capacity limitations that restrict our ability to meet farmers' needs.
<p>The nature of this initiative points to the main issue: brand new farmers can get lost in the myriad of service providers and not know who to contact with or who to start with. 15-20 years ago, UVM's Beginner Farmer Program was kind of the starting point and the clearing house to connect beginner farmers to all of the other resources and service providers.</p> <p>We often think of new and beginner farmers as totally coming from outside agriculture and efforts mainly target those individual. But, I see that the employees on existing farms, and also the adult children of farmers often don't always understand what services are out there since its the older generation on the farm that taps those resources, and don't always include the younger generation. These people also need to be reached, and to help them develop into future managers and owner-operators. We can't just support people creating brand new farms; we need to help develop the skills of the next generation already working on our established farms.</p> <p>We can always use more funds to provide our services, who doesn't. Our free services at Land For Good for new and beginning farmers are currently, largely limited to initial consultations-- We can't work more extensively with the beginner farmers without some other funding--Often we tap into Viability if they are eligible, or some other short-term grant</p>

<p>we might have, but its challenging not having consistent funding.</p> <p>If we are serious in VT about attracting, developing and retaining BIPOC farmers, we need to working on resource translation and interpretation services for non-English speakers. We also need to keep working on how we make our predominantly white rural communities welcoming and save for BIPOC families.</p> <p>VLT needs more money for Buy-Protect-Sell efforts.</p>
<p>BIPOC farmers and land stewards</p> <p>Meta-level land access challenges</p>
<p>We interact primarily with value-add producers and occasional inquiries about starting farm operations. We can handle the inquiries. But outreach to value-add producers is limited by staff capacity.</p>
<p>The scope of my work is limited by my grant funding to provide technical assistance only to dairy producers, not other livestock producers. I see a great need for more TA providers for livestock and field lots of inquiries from folks with small numbers of sheep and/or goats.</p>
<p>Not at this point. We have a enough staff who are highly skilled. Training and finding the funding to retain that staff is a concern.</p>
<p>Capital to start with. Sometimes we can get grants, but there is no money to spend to then gets reimbursed for. New farmers need a lot more attention to build stuff and a lot to learn. We need a livestock specialist at UVM, but I do a lot of that off the cuff during my job as a pasture specialist.</p>
<p>we don't currently have dedicated funding to support work with new and beginning farmers. Additionally, folks are usually not serving themselves well with their bookkeeping and financial recordkeeping, but there aren't sufficient bookkeepers and tax preparers available who have experience with farm financials. We would love more consistent folks to refer people to (and with whom we could contract on bookkeeping trainings)</p>
<p>We are always stressed for personnel as there is a pretty intense work load.</p>
<p>This is another wide open question that the meeting should address.</p>
<p>As a loan fund it is always difficult to lend money to new farmers with no or limited assets who are farming on leased land. Historical cash flow is not available, so projected cash flow is necessary and this means the farmer needs to have technical expertise in financial projections and financial management.</p>
<p>The lack of sufficient down payment or collateral is a limiting factor in how much can be borrowed. Aspiring new and beginning farmers don't always have necessary financial literacy to prepare them to farm successfully.</p>
<p>Our programs cant really support very beginning farmers who need training on how to actually farm and people who want access to land but don't want to have a commercial farm business but they want more of a homestead. There is a need for more tools for farmland affordability if the land cannot be conserved or has already been conserved and is still very expensive, more opportunities to lease parcels of land and get your business started before buying a farm. More support is also needed in helping farmers figure out the regulatory environment once they are on a property but want to build, host events, expand in to value added processing, etc.</p>
<p>We are not an agricultural advising organization so while all of our advisors are strong business advisors, they do not all have strong ag backgrounds. Team members often refer clients to me as the ag specialist, but even that provides limited ag specific assistance. I</p>

am familiar with basic ag business planning, and have basic info about ag segments, but I often refer to our ag specific partners.

**How could existing programs for new and beginning farmers change to better meet the needs of new and beginning farmers?**

I'll have to come back to this.

Some of my answer to number 15 probably applies. I think all of the programs here in VT are constantly evolving and changing as we get feedback from stakeholders. I will be interested to hear from the current generation what they think is missing, and will be interested to hear if the perceived needs have changed? Or if there are gaps that we have been missing?

If VLT had more money for Buy-Protect-Sell projects, that would help a great deal.

We need to work more on affordable housing on farmers for farmers—and need to work more with the people in the housing arena on this.

It was a real loss to the State that the Intervale shut down their incubator.

Service provider training for innovative, cooperative models for business ownership/management and land ownership/stewardship. This is on my radar screen to help Calley figure out.

Clear and simple website with information. Clearinghouse/person to provide direct assistance to answer questions.

More advertising of the programs and clarifying the specifics of the different offerings.

Better collaboration with lenders and other service providers.

Groups of similar level farmers with classes on each of the subjects of loans, grants, designs, plans, education, etc.

My initial thinking is making the [loan] application process fully transparent and clearly identifying what information is important to have in the system.

An above noted web page a data hub for all the information they are seeking to find.

I'm not sure of the answer but making farmland more accessible and affordable and with adequate housing, whether owned or rented, is a real challenge. TA that lasts 2-3 years would be beneficial.

I think we all need to come together to define who we are working with and what we are doing to better understand the gaps

I think it is important for people to understand the basics of business before starting any business, and I think there should be a more clear path of resources. I am at times concerned there is a gap for the earliest stage ag businesses - the Extension New Farmer Program resources are limited and the Viability Program is geared toward more established businesses.

**Do you feel that the existing network of programs and organizations serving new and beginning farmers is easy for farmers to navigate, well-coordinated, and sufficiently resourced? Please explain.**

I'll have to come back to this.

Define "sufficiently resourced". We are all mostly chasing down soft money year-to-year. While many times we collaborate on accessing funds, sometime we are in direct competition, and could collaborate more instead in pursuing funding.

<p>I don't think that its initially easy for a beginner farmer to navigate the system, and that could be improved. But, once someone makes a connection somewhere in the network of providers, I think most VT providers are good about directly farmers to other resources and providers and programs and making good connections.</p>
<p>I think that for many the amazing network of services and resources in Vermont can be hard to navigate - so many people, so many acronyms. I think that the new and beginning farmers that get connected to service providers at the Intervale Center or NOFA-VT have points of contact that they can depend on to help them navigate. I do think frequently about the fact that there are many folks out there not on list-servs, outreach lists that will only find out about available programs by chance and we don't know how to get on those folks' radar screens proactively.</p>
<p>There are plenty of resources. But like economic development, its siloed and there is a lack of coordination.</p>
<p>I think there are many resources for new and beginning farmers in Vermont, and many of the farmers who reach out to me are not aware of them.</p>
<p>I feel like we have enough programs to meet demand but collaboration could be better. Long-term funding for staffing is a concern.</p>
<p>No, I feel like it's up to us as providers to give full lists of what is available.</p>
<p>Pretty well resourced, not as well coordinated. I think also that we as a service provider community could do a better job conveying to farm owners/sellers that they 'can't take their farm with them'...in other words they need to be more accommodating for a new generation of farmers – being willing to mentor, lease or seller-finance is great but only if you let the new farmers drive the tractor and make the decisions. Too many partnerships like this fall apart.</p>
<p>It's easy to say no to all of those things. Part of the issue is coordination, there are many different but closely linked partner organizations. Some of which do not have actual capital to lend or grant but are an important part of the support mechanism for farmers, like Extension and Conservation Districts. It is very easy for farmers, new and established, to get confused. partly because their daily focus is a list of things that have to be completed on that particular day.</p>
<p>Again, the above noted [<a href="#">UVM Extension Beginning Farmer Resource Hub</a>] web page is going to be a fabulous resource.</p>
<p>I think its improving with the Vermont Farm to Plate resources.</p>
<p>There is a broad network that might benefit from a central portal that disperses information on the various programs and services. Many providers know each other's respective work and the F2P network maintains various resource lists.</p>
<p>No, I think we need more farmer training opportunities and very early stage programs like NOFA Farm Beginnings to really cultivate the next generation of farm business owners. I also think we need more opportunities for people to get on smaller parcels of land.</p>
<p>This is a topic that was being addressed in the Farm to Plate early days with a working group. I am not aware of any final outcomes from that as my work took me away from direct involvement - and I have not seen any specific outcomes from that effort.</p>
<p>Not easy to navigate at all. Too many programs doing too many things and too much turnover.</p>



**What is working well in your organization's collaboration and coordination with other organizations and programs serving new and beginning farmers?**

I'll have to come back to this.

We work in all 6 New England States, and have participated in national efforts. From that, I can say that VT service providers are well ahead of other states in terms of collaboration and coordination. The Farm 2 Plate initiative has helped some with that. And while not strictly a beginner farmer program, the Farm Viability Program helps with this since a number of the main farm service providers in the state collaborate through that program. Members of Land For Good, VLT, and the Intervale staff meet regularly to talk about the "land access" landscape in VT, as well as about specific farm seekers and farm properties.

Coordination with the Intervale Center and VHCB programs

It also seems to work well that we specialize in two cohort-based programs that compliment others' 1-1 coaching services and can refer back and forth to each other

Referral to experts and resources. But need a website they can be referred to that answers basic questions.

Being part of the Farm Viability Program and their efforts to provide professional development and coordination. Strong personal ties with other service providers to leverage resources for farm clients.

I feel like we have created a group of people to tag team providing for these new farmers. I think it's taken me about 2 years to fully understand all the programs and people to support farmers in the state.

Right now I think we are at the early stages of collaboration. I have reached out to some of the groups, like VHCB Farm Viability and Intervale Center, to see what we can coordinate. Jill Thomas has only been our Beginning Farmer and Rancher coordinator for a few months. I think reaching out is something that I personally am interested in, and I'm helped, to a degree, by my previous work contacts.

Communication within the USDA and UVM extension.

We have always worked well with the VT Small Business Development Centers and the Agency of Agriculture. The Intervale Center is another good resource.

Very good work relationship with TA providers who are a source of referrals for financing and whom we share information with. FSA participation loans and Beginning Farmer guarantees work well for eligible businesses.

Touching base very often is helpful. For example, myself and two other land access staff at other organizations talk every other month for about 90 minutes and touch base about projects and individuals to make sure we are all aware of what farm seekers are out there, what properties are out there for sale, what resources are coming out, how we might be able to support one another. I think showing up to meetings together is also really effective so that farmers themselves don't need to navigate a million different service providers separately.

We have a strong connection with the Farm and Forest Viability program, providing referrals and sharing information with each other. We have a less robust relationship with other programs and would be happy to develop stronger connections.

We are trying to be a central hub for all farmers to come to get directed to the right place.

**How could the coordination and communication across organizations and programs serving new and beginning farmers improve?**

I'll have to come back to this.
We could work together more on funding, and about planning programs together.
Get the rest of the network, including Agency staff, NRCD/NRCS staff, and all major lenders in the state well-versed in what is being offered so that appropriate referrals can be made by all initial points of contact Maybe develop some sort of flow chart/visual but keep it high level so doesn't need to get updated frequently
List serve providing updates on new programs and services and NOFO announcements; place to enter new clients with referral mechanism.
Better understanding of all of the programs out there and a centralized referral contact.
I feel like I have no issues communicating. I do have to wait often for some NRCS soil cons to communicate with me. Some soil cons are very prompt and great to work with. In general, many of the programs understand each other pretty well except NRCS which has the most power and money and probably doesn't need to understand the other programs as well. It does seem like I spend time acting as a project coordinator for each farmer's projects.
A funding stream to the Farm Viability program from the state that explicitly funds new and beginning farmer work?
One issue is availability of time, I think there are organizations that simply don't have the capacity, because they are all volunteer. So improving that equation is important.
Again, this web page hub seems like a great source.
I would like to see a strengthening of the producer associations within the state - VT Specialty Foods, Cheese Council, etc. Many associations that serve small new and beginning farmers struggle with self-sufficiency since small producers cannot afford the cost of services.
A meeting between them could bring organizations together as there have been many staffing changes and it would be good to share ideas and challenges.
I don't have an answer readily at hand.

<b>We are considering running a new and beginning farmer survey to better understand new farmer successes and challenges navigating the existing programming and supports. Before sending a mass survey...</b>
I'll have to come back to this.
Seems like we have. But, I have seen so many beginner farmer statistics, I can't remember what and where. I will check in with my peers.
I'll send the survey results of our most recent Farm Beginnings evaluations along in the near future
No data available
I do not have any survey data to share.
We have not sent evaluation surveys to our beginning farmer client for the last two years but intend to do so this year. we did so annually before that. We saw consistent positive feedback for our services and self-reported changes in improved business management skills among the majority of farm clients.
I will think about this. This should probably be a discussion in your convening meetings rather than something requested in this survey. I think most of this data is anecdotal but

important to capture and I DON'T think you should send a survey to new and beginning farms. I recently saw a National Young Farmers Coalition survey that only 22% of new and young farmers are from farm families but that seems like a gross self-selection by survey respondents. Young farmers from farm families are not necessarily connected to a progressive group like the NYFC.

I will let Jill Thomas answer this question

Would like to discuss this information at the meetings scheduled.

VLT did a survey in 2015 of farmers that participated in both VLTs FAP program and the farm viability program. We also did a survey of our farm seekers in 2021 in coordination with a UVM grad student to understand the needs of farm seekers.

This information In a very basic level might be available through our lead center. I will research that for you.

# APPENDIX 4: STAGES OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets  
Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation  
Agency of Commerce & Community Development

(from Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund)

## Stages of the Business Development

### Pre-Venture Stage

Planning and research are the primary activities involved in the pre-venture stage of business development.

### Seed Stage

The seed stage of a business lifecycle is when your business is just a thought or an idea. Most seed stage companies will have to overcome the challenge of market acceptance. At this stage of the business the focus is on matching the business opportunity with your skills, experience, and passions. Other focal points include deciding on a business ownership structure, finding professional advisors, and business planning. Early in the business life cycle, with no proven market or customers, the business will rely on cash from owners, friends, and family. Other potential sources include suppliers, customers, and government grants.

### Start-up Stage

The start-up stage of a business is a company that is in the initial stages of its operations. Often initially funded by entrepreneurial founders, as they attempt to capitalize on developing a product or services for which they believe there is demand.

### Early Stage

Achieving break-even sales targets, building a customer base, and establishing your brand and track record are at the core of the early stage of the business life cycle. To do so, however, also requires close attention to operational financing, cash flow management, accounting and record keeping, as well as updates to the business and marketing plans. Legal services, human resources, and risk management are also key areas requiring attention. In this stage the push is to get essentials in place so that the business is viable and can sustain itself.

### Growth Stage

Growth stage businesses seek to take off from their base level of sales and operations, becoming profitable and, in time, achieving a higher base. Expanding your business requires more than increased sales and employment. Growth often requires assessing and adjusting the organizational structure, delegating management control, and developing longer-term strategies for human resources, access to capital, and expansion through a strategic planning process. Some firms grow in spurts as a result of focused programs and others expand continuously.

### Maturity

Mature companies have achieved a solid business that, because of either market conditions or the preferences of owners, appear sustainable but which, without dramatic change, are unlikely to expand significantly. Even though they have achieved strong recognition, branding, goodwill, and a solid repeat customer base, mature businesses often face many challenges. Sustaining business in a rapidly changing and competitive market place or in the face of declining sales can be a major challenge. A focus on problem solving, leadership, and quality improvement can often be necessary for a mature business to maintain its position in the marketplace. Often, planning for the succession of leadership, or an exit strategy for the business is the most appropriate strategy.

### Revitalization

Implementing action items coming out of planning efforts in the maturity stage can send an organization in new directions. Innovation and diversification can lead to new products and new markets. Companies can be reorganized to provide the flexibility needed to meet the new challenges associated with new directions, markets and products.

