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Conference
update:
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The Quarterly Newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Organic Farmer Profile: Seth Gardner

by Mimi Arnstein, NOFA Vermont board member

I wanted to interview Seth Gardner because he made such an impression on me, when I heard him give testimony at the Vermont Statehouse in the spring of 2013. He was supporting Bill S.38, which, after it passed the legislature and received Governor Shumlin's signature, gave people the legal right to apply for and receive a driver's license regardless of their citizenship status. The intent of this bill was to enable Vermont's undocumented workers to legally drive, thus reducing their risk when leaving the farms on which they are employed to buy food, go to the doctor, or visit friends. It would also in effect, as Seth emotionally stated in his testimony, increase their dignity, mobility and sense of empowerment.

Seth Gardner is a dairy farmer in East Montpelier at McKnight Farm and serves on the NOFA-VT Board of Directors. He produces certified organic milk, which is sold primarily to Horizon, as well as raw milk, eggs and meat sold off the farm. Here are the stats: 9 tractors, 8 trucks, 272 Holstein milkers, about the same number of heifers, 1200 acres of land. And a crew that includes 4 migrant workers.

It took courage and integrity to speak out as Seth did. I remember the emotion in his voice, his plea as a farmer on behalf of hard working farm crews and in favor of the drivers' license bill. "I feel they [migrant workers] need access to the same things that other people have." His voice faltered as he continued. "We're talking about empowerment. What some of these men and women are subjected to on farms in



Seth Gardner (Courtesy photo)

remote areas is not something that we as a state should turn a blind eye to." He painted a verbal picture of someone in unfamiliar surroundings, with a different language, seeking to work. He explained what can happen "when people wind up on your doorstep, willing to work, and you have a lot of work to do...when one person has all the power and [others] have no power, it lends itself to abuse."

Seth didn't grow up on a farm. In fact, his father was a college professor, his grandfather a New Jersey state senator, and his mom an author. But he started shoveling cow manure and working with draft horses around age 15 when his folks bought a rundown farm on Cape Breton Island, Canada. By the sounds of it, he learned from the school of hard knocks: breaking stuff and rebuilding it, working full time as a farrier off the farm, building a business by being frugal and hardworking. Listening to him talk, he seemed like he was from an era long since past, leaving home at age 18 with a duffel bag thrown over his shoulder and \$800 (which he parleyed into \$1600) and then spent on a truck and horseshoes to start a wandering-farrier business. In 1992 he bought his farm in East Montpelier.



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Winter Thoughts from Enid

Darkness and Light

In the homestretch towards the darkest day of the year, I reflect on Rep. Mike Pompeo's (R-KS) H.R. 4432 "Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act of 2014" dubbed the "Deny Americans the Right-to-Know Act" or DARK Act by its critics. If passed, it would block states from passing genetically engineered food labeling laws and pre-empt Vermont's labeling law. At a time when more than 90% of Americans support labeling GE food, and want to know what's in our food and how it's grown, passage of the DARK Act would deny eaters this basic right. On December 10th, a hearing on the bill in DC drew 700 people representing 22 states to protest the bill and bring greater awareness to what many feel is a political hijacking by packaged food companies and corporations, like Monsanto, who are financing the opposition to right-to-know initiatives. The NOFA-VT staff members gathered on December 10th, in Richmond, Vermont, in solidarity of the protest in DC (*see photo on page 7*).

In contrast, Vandana Shiva's presence in Vermont on November 2nd and 3rd was pure, radiant light. Vandana volunteered her time in Vermont to honor the grassroots efforts that were instrumental in passing the first GMO labeling law in the country. Maine and Connecticut have passed similar laws, but those laws can't be enacted unless four or five neighboring states also pass mandatory GMO labeling bills. The DARK Act would make that impossible, leaving the laws in Maine and Connecticut effectively dead. A GMO labeling bill in Oregon was just shy of the votes needed to pass, so Vermont stands alone with its labeling law.

Vandana's visit was organized by the Vermont Right to Know GMOs Coalition (VPIRG, NOFA-VT, Rural Vermont and Cedar Circle Farm). I was so honored to be able to introduce Vandana Shiva's talk at City Hall in Burlington, on November 2nd. Vandana has long inspired me and so many others who care about organic farming, biodiversity and

food sovereignty. She was recognized as an environmental hero by Time Magazine and recently received the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the alternative Nobel Peace Prize). Vandana is currently a leader in the Global Alliance for Seed Freedom, a campaign to alert citizens and governments around the world about how precarious our seed supply is and the impact that poses on world food security.

If the Lorax speaks for the trees, Vandana speaks for the seeds.

When I was preparing for Vandana's talk, and reading about her leadership, it struck me that if the Lorax speaks for the trees, Vandana Shiva speaks for the seeds. She refers to the outcome of genetically modified seeds being released as "climate chaos and climate disruption."

"When a new gene is introduced, the biodiversity is impacted on a planet where everything is alive and everything is interacting," she explained. She said that the organic movement is so strong, at this time, because we need alternatives; organic management results in soils that absorb carbon, and soils rich in carbon are water reservoirs. "When most of the ecological destruction of the planet is rooted in industrial agriculture, we need to shift to ecological agricultural production and cut that."

A full recording of Vandana's talk, is available on our youtube channel (http://youtu.be/SX-mG_JCkxE) Thank you to one of our members, Catherine Lowther, for making the recommendation to livestream the event. The Coalition was able to do this, and make it possible for many more people to view Vandana's talk without travelling. Catherine then organized a house party in the Montpelier area to view the talk. I look forward to seeing many of you and attending more light-filled talks at our upcoming Winter Conference. In the meantime, enjoy the solstice and holidays.

NOFA Vermont is an organization of farmers, gardeners, & consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system for the benefit of current and future generations.

Growing the Good Food Movement

By Rachel Fussell, NOFA Vermont Education and Beginning Farmer Coordinator

The NOFA-VT Winter Conference brings together the whole spectrum of Vermont's farm and food economy: farmers, gardeners and homesteaders, as well as food activists, educators, local-vores and students. With over 80 different workshops, roundtables and activities, this dynamic mix makes the winter conference one of the most exciting events of the year for anyone interested in food systems and farming in Vermont.

Many workshops this year offer hands-on components, including Maple Candy and Sweets with Couture Maple

Shop, Mozzarella Making with Family Cow Farmstand, Fermented Foods with Fermentation on Wheels, and Homebrewing with Wolaver's Fine Organic Ales. We are also excited to announce that the Direct Marketing Conference, traditionally held in January, will take place as part of the Winter Conference this year, with more marketing workshops.

These workshops will offer new and experienced farmers' market coordinators

and vendors, CSA farmers and organizers, and farm stand operators a wealth of learning and networking opportunities to grow their direct-to-consumer sales.

Whether you're a life-long farmer or planning your first garden, interested in bees or beer-making, pork or permaculture, education or community gardens, there's something for you at NOFA-VT's Winter Conference.

Meet the 2015 Winter Conference keynote speaker: Natasha Bowens

Traveling the country, storyteller and photographer Natasha Bowens collected stories from farmers and food activists of color. These accounts are collected in her new beautiful book, *The Color of Food: Stories of Race, Resilience and Farming*, highlighting important issues of food justice and food sovereignty. We knew right away that she would speak powerfully and eloquently to the theme of our 33rd Annual Winter Conference, *Growing the Good Food Movement*. Blending storytelling, photography and oral history, Natasha's Saturday morning keynote address will show how true food sovereignty means a place at the table for everyone.

Natasha writes: *"[Race and food] are two pillars of society that are deeply etched with injustice. From seed to table, the corporate-controlled food industry in this country is rife with discrimination, oppression and the denial of rights. Rights to healthy food, rights to land, rights to a clean environment, and rights to an equal opportunity for success and livelihood for farmers are not fairly attainable. One problem is that the people who control this broken food system do not represent the most impacted communities: women and communities of*



Natasha Bowens: storyteller, photographer, oral historian.

color and low income. Another problem is that the "food movement" community is usually racially and economically exclusive which just perpetuates the cycle. If we cannot see and hear from our communities, we will not have a food system free of racial inequities." ❧

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What's the Value of Your CSA?

By Michael Good, NOFA Vermont, Community Food Security Program Assistant

There are a number of reasons why consumers choose to purchase locally-sourced foods. For some it is the comfort gained from having a relationship with the farmers who produce their food, and trusting what they are putting into their bodies. For others, it's the enjoyment gained from receiving a variety of produce in concert with the season and weather conditions. Many find the quality and variety to be superior to what they can buy in a store. Amidst these benefits, is a recurring question about the economic value of a CSA share: is what they're getting a better deal than they could get elsewhere? There is a perception that local foods from a direct market (e.g. CSAs and farmers' markets) cost more than foods obtained from a grocery store. Unfortunately, there is currently little information or research available to either confirm or debunk this belief.

We think this question of comparative value needs answering, for both farmers and consumers. A few summers ago, a team of NOFA-VT interns undertook a farmers' market price comparison study, tracking prices for produce and eggs at farmers' markets, food co-ops, and grocery stores statewide. That study showed that certified organic produce was almost always less expensive at a farmers' market, and non-certified products were often competitively priced as well.

This past summer, NOFA-VT embarked on the challenge of attempting to gain a better understanding of the value of CSA shares in Vermont. While seasoned CSA farmers have a firm grasp on the overall value of the share they provide every week relative to their cost of production, they may lack awareness of the comparative advantage to a customer of purchasing their CSA share over filling a shopping cart with the same (or similar)



Many CSA customers enjoy receiving a variety of produce in concert with the season. (Photo: Elizabeth Ferry)

products. Similarly, a customer may not be able to clearly calculate the relative monetary cost of a CSA share versus a grocery store trip.

Recognizing this gap in communication, NOFA-VT piloted a CSA Pricing Study, with the hope of gaining a foundational understanding of whether or not CSAs offered a comparative advantage over the grocery store. Although there are many external factors that influence the purchasing behaviors of consumers and the perceived value of their purchases, this study focused on the variable that was most readily quantifiable and influential in the marketplace: price.

This summer, under the guidance of Erin Buckwalter, Direct Market Development and Community Food Security Programs Coordinator, and Allison Ross, the summer Direct Marketing Intern, the NOFA-VT summer intern team worked with seven farms (four certified organic and three non-certified) and four grocery stores in central Vermont to collect data. Farms were organized in pairs (one certified and one non-certified)

that were geographically close to each other, and these pairs then had their prices compared against a common nearby grocery store. Data were collected three times during the summer.

Currently, these data are being analyzed and collected into a report. The results of this study will be made available to the public later this winter, and on the NOFA-VT website. By sharing the results of the CSA Pricing Study, we hope to provide farmers with a tool to communicate to their customers (both current and future) the value of their shares, compared to purchasing the same foods from a nearby grocery store.

NOFA-VT has received funding to replicate and expand the CSA Pricing Study statewide in 2015 or 2016. We thank the seven farms that participated in the pilot study this summer, and we look forward to working with more farms across the state in the near future! 🌱

More info:

- www.nofavt.org/price-study
- www.nofavt.org/find-organic-food/csa-listing

Do you have a story or poem to share at the Winter Conference? Please participate in the Story & Poetry Slam!

We invite you (yes, you!) to submit a story or poem by January 23rd to be considered for inclusion in the slam.



Inspired by the revitalization of storytelling in Vermont and beyond, we're opening our keynote stage on Sunday morning for a Story and Poetry Slam.

The theme of the conference—and the storytelling—is *Growing the Good Food Movement*. Tell us a specific story or read us a poem about how you have experienced, or are addressing, farm or

food equity, race, class, farm worker rights, or food sovereignty in your work or life.

To submit your story or poem, call the NOFA Vermont office at 802-434-4122 and ask to be connected to extension 30. Leave a message telling us your story or poem – be sure to include your name and how we can reach you! Stories and poems must be 5 minutes or shorter. Deadline for submissions is January 23rd.

Submissions will be reviewed by our winter conference planning team. We will select 5 storytellers and notify them by February 1.

Hosting the Story and Poetry Slam (and performing, as well) will be Laura Brown-Lavoie. Laura is a farmer,

poet, performer, and youth mentor in Providence, RI, whose 2012 Winter Conference performance was one of our most popular.

Learn more at www.nofavt.org/conference.



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“Only when you get to this age do you know a little bit.” He’s talking like he’s 80 but in fact is far from it. The business-orientation of most farmers these days was unfamiliar then. “The idea was that to own a farm you needed a job to support it. The culture tells you that you can’t make any money farming.” And so he pursued his dream of farming while working full time shoeing horses and milking his cows, including the 3 a.m. shift.

Seth knows his business now. He talks easily about dairy farming as a quickly evolving business in which many have moved from tie stall to free stall barns, dry hay to silage and haylage, hand labor to robotic milkers.

Yet labor remains a big challenge on dairy farms. “Locals don’t show up. They’re not reliable. They don’t want to work the night shift.” Unlike migrant laborers, they are not thinking of a better future. After one too many no-shows and days and nights working solo, Seth decided to hire non-local labor and he uninhibitedly talks about how well it has worked. Migrant farmworkers “work hard because their goal is to make money to build a better future” in their home countries. All his employees from Mexico have bought land back home and have aspirations to build houses there.

“The better you treat your employees, the better off you are. They are doing a lot of work for you and you want to keep them happy.” However, he says, migrant workers are exploited often. With no place to go, often not speaking much English, they can find themselves in conditions where they are not paid for their work, or they don’t have adequate food or decent housing. But incrementally and with the Vermont Migrant Justice’s campaigns, like the drivers’ license bill, communication and organizing among migrant workers is improving.

He punctuated his points by gesturing with a plastic red fly swatter picked up from among the mail scattered on the kitchen table. The radio played from the next room. “There are three kinds of dairy farms,” he asserted. The first are those that are progressive in thought and action, reinvesting in buildings, people, machinery and cows. The second group are those “farming by subtraction” who are mining the equity of the farm to continue and merely repeat old practices. Lastly are the small scale “idealists” with up to 10 cows. It’s the first group that makes the future of Vermont dairy look robust to Seth.

“Farming is profitable!” he exclaims and kills a fly with a whack. The most important traits necessary for success are a determined mindset, a can-do attitude, intelligence and the ability to make connections. “Opportunity is all around

you. Successful farms are opportunistic.” He recommends that aspiring farmers partner with an older, more experienced farmer who is transitioning out of business. Before making the leap it is vital to assess one’s strengths, weaknesses and goals. It also helps to be good at a lot of different things, including multi-tasking and managing people. He humbly adds, “I didn’t realize that management is a skill unto itself. It is hard to find a good manager.” Judging from the fact that he is the Chairman of the East Montpelier Selectboard, he has that covered.

Organic practice was always part of his thought process but he wasn’t certified at first. In the past, he tried Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH) and confinement. “I learned by making my own mistakes. But it’s better to learn from other people’s mistakes.” Seth had heard from other farmers that going organic wasn’t feasible due to the high cost of feed, but in hindsight he feels that “the mistake was not calling NOFA to go to the source of information. Don’t rely on hearsay. See for yourself.”

Seth believed in the organic concept but feared it would not be profitable. Still working off the farm as a farrier in 2006 while milking 150 cows, he sought a better living and a better way of life. That year he called NOFA-VT, and dairy specialist Willie Gibson visited McKnight Farm. “Willie was a huge help and so informative. It took only one visit with Willie and I was completely on board.”

Now that he’s eight years in, he knows with total confidence that becoming certified organic was a good move. And he doesn’t shoe horses any more. “I like what we do. In or-

“Farming is profitable!” he exclaims and kills a fly with a whack. The most important traits necessary for success are a determined mindset, a can-do attitude, intelligence and the ability to make connections.

ganics, we focus on prevention instead of bandaids. It’s a different way of thinking.” Plus now he consistently makes money.

He admits that farming organically has become more financially challenging as expenses continue to rise. A delicate supply and demand ratio affects the pay price. Thankfully the organic milk market is strong, perhaps most recently due to concerns over genetically modified organisms (GMOs), he surmises. Seth explained that in the past, the demand was from a relatively small group of customers who were willing to pay a premium price. The next marketing step was to enlarge the consumer base and to do so, the organic

Continued on page 7 »

Gardner, continued from page 6

milk price was held down in order to reduce the disparity in cost to the consumer. Most recently the organic milk price has been going up a bit and there is a shortage of organic milk.

So things are looking good for organic milk producers right now. Is farming a good choice for Seth? “I love being my own boss. I love building, tinkering, the constant challenges. And I like being an ‘empire builder.’ I enjoy owning land and taking good care of the land.” In fact it is very difficult to find land to buy in the area, Seth says, and so he rents quite a bit of farmland, which has other benefits. “I keep the dream alive for the owners who are often older people. They are excited to have the land farmed because they have an appreciation for the tradition of farming.”

Seth knows his farm’s history in his community and he is proud of it; it comes alive when he tells its stories and talks about its future. Seth Gardner’s land has been continuously in production since 1796 beginning with Lemuel McKnight and eventually run by Emma McKnight a few generations later when her husband George had a heart attack in 1933. The house Seth and his family live in was built in 1838. Seth chose to name the farm after this settler, rather than after himself. “I wanted to say something about the people who farmed this land for nearly 200 years before me. It’s not about me. It’s about the people who picked the rocks, who took the trees down, who slaved.”

The farming community has experienced huge shifts, Seth explained. In the early 1800s, East Montpelier had about 180 farms with around 10 cows each. “In the past, farms were small and there was a shared social fabric. This changes when there are only a few farms. Folks live in the old houses now, but they work outside the farm.” The community is adversely affected by having fewer farmers because neighbors don’t share the same problems, trade equipment and labor, or engage in common efforts. Folks don’t depend on each other in the same way and thus community relationships lack depth and strength.

As for the next generation, it remains to be seen if any of Seth’s four daughters will continue on the farm. “At some point I want to transition to a younger farmer, but I want to keep it organic.” In the short term he’d like to find someone to manage the herd so he can take some time away from the farm. That would be time well earned. In the meantime, he says, “I choose and enjoy farming. And I make money.”



The staff of NOFA-VT took this selfie to show solidarity with VT Right to Know GMOs, protesting against the DARK Act, which attack states’ rights to enact GMO labeling laws.



SAVE THE DATE!

NOFA Vermont’s 33rd Annual Winter Conference
“Growing the Good Food Movement” is February 14-16, 2015 at the University of Vermont in Burlington. Registration begins 1/5/15.

www.nofavt.org/conference



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An Upbeat NOSB Meeting

By Dr. Jean Richardson, Chair NOSB, VOF Organic Inspector

The latest meeting of the fifteen-member National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) was held in Louisville Kentucky from October 27-30. NOSB meetings serve as a forum for public comment on possible revisions to the organic standards, and an opportunity for the board to devise official recommendations for standards updates to the National Organic Program (NOP). The NOP then takes these comments and recommendations into consideration when making changes to the standards, such as altering what materials are allowed in organic production. In recent years, there has been some debate as to the relationship and relative authority of the NOSB and the NOP.

As the Board Chair, I made opening comments at the October meeting, addressing these tensions as well as the growing power of organic within the USDA:

“Like many of you here in this room I have been involved in ‘organics’ since long before we had the USDA Green Seal. But I was reminded recently when I gave a presentation to the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture that we can lose our way and forget that even though Organics is now a 35 billion dollar industry, it is still only about 3% of agriculture in terms of dollar sales, and only 1% in terms of farmable land. Quite small when put into perspective.

Then think about the USDA. It is a HUGE agency. And I found that when you walk around the extensive cafeteria in the Washington USDA Building you cannot buy whole fat organic milk, let alone creamline non-homogenized milk, and certainly not RAW milk!

The NOP has been working to increase the organic literacy of the inhabitants of the USDA building, but it is slow going.

There are a lot of entrenched ideas, over-complicated Rules and Regulations, and competing interests – and we must all work with all of that.

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is a very small part of USDA, and the NOP is a tiny part of AMS.

When the Organic Food Production Act was written in 1990 and Regulations were developed, we were an even smaller sector and there was almost no processed organic food. Now processed organics is growing fast, but we have to produce organic food within the context of our US “cheap food” policy, which reduces slim profit margins and increases competition. The Europeans, by contrast, are happy to pay much more for their food, so farmers and processors in Britain and Europe can have higher profit margins for organic products.

We must work to boost consumer confidence, improve labels on products, reduce consumer confusion and maybe spend less time and energy on the one hand suggesting that our organic products may be dangerous to eat, or on the other complaining that the NOSB is failing to give every producer and processor all the materials they want on the National List.

So my plea with us all here today is, ‘Pick your battles!’ Working together, building partnerships is the only way to go.

We are part of a complex system, so we should use Systems Thinking, from the farm as a system to the multi-ingredient chocolate chip cookie production to the global marketplace, constantly challenged by change.

Let us remind ourselves that everything



Dr. Jean Richardson
Chairperson, National Organic Standards Board

For more information: Watch our interview with Jean Richardson: <http://youtu.be/PUE7dxOP-Y4>

is interconnected, and our interlocking agriculture policies and regulations must strengthen the connections, not destroy them. Because if WE cannot work together, building partnerships between diverse stakeholder groups, we may face the economic and environmental Tragedy of the Commons articulated many years ago by Garrett Hardin. This theory outlines how individuals, acting independently, and rationally, each according to individual self-interest, behave contrary to the best long-term interests of the whole group and thus deplete the common resource, such as soil or water. And in this case we may lose our market niche in organic food production.

It is not realistic to demand that there be absolutely no synthetic materials in anything with the organic seal and it is not realistic to ask for every synthetic or every tool in the tool box – and the NOP must work more collaboratively with the NOSB in all aspects of our work. We all have our roles to play.

Together we have to move towards the common ground. We must be as proactive as possible as a COMMUNITY, working with all the changes, be sure we are asking the right questions and always think in an interdisciplinary manner with systems thinking.

Let's seek common ground together.” 🌱

Fun & Learning at the Children's Conference



An important part of the NOFA Vermont's annual Winter Conference is the Children's Conference. Find out what's happening this year at nofavt.org/conference. Registration begins January 5, 2015.



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NOFA-VT Welcomes New Staff

By Enid Wonnacott, NOFA Vermont Executive Director

We are excited to welcome two new staff members to NOFA-VT! Maddie Monty will take the place of Barbara Richardson as our new Office Manager and Policy Advisor, and Kim Mercer is replacing Caitlin Gildrien as Outreach and Marketing Coordinator. While it is always sad and difficult to say goodbye to beloved staff members, we are excited for both Barbara and Caitlin's next steps. Barbara is moving to southern Vermont for a new adventure, and Caitlin is due with her second child in the middle of December and will continue working with NOFA part-time on graphic design. I want to thank them both publicly for years of tremendous care of our NOFA members and friends.



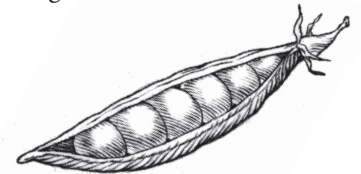
After working and playing out West for several years, Maddie is happy to be back in her home state of Vermont. Maddie started her work in agriculture with the Youth Garden Project in Moab, Utah. While living in Colorado, she worked as the Education Coordinator at an ecology center in the Rockies

and as CSA Manager for an organic vegetable farm outside of Boulder. Maddie was instrumental in working with the Vermont Right to Know GMOs Coalition on the GMO labeling law last year, and is currently pursuing a Master of Environmental Law and Policy at Vermont Law School, focusing on food and agriculture policy. Maddie lives in Cambridge with her boyfriend, two dogs, and a cat.



Kim has extensive experience in delivering brand consistency, website upkeep and non-profit outreach. She has worked for the Highfields Center for Composting, Senator Bernie Sanders, the University of Vermont, The Shubert Organization in New York City, and The Music Hall in

Portsmouth, NH. Kim lives in Jericho with her husband, two children, two cats, 17 hens, and a dog.



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Winter Policy Update

By Maddie Monty, NOFA Vermont Office Manager and Policy Advisor



If I've learned anything in my short time thus far at NOFA-VT, it's that I have some big, beloved shoes to fill. In mid-November I took over as NOFA's new Policy Advisor, following in the footsteps of Dave Rogers. I was lucky enough to work alongside Dave for the first half of 2014 as part of the Vermont Right to Know Coalition, and was so proud to be involved in Vermont's passage of our nation's first no-strings-attached GMO labeling law in May. As we transition into the new year, I am thrilled to be joining the team at NOFA to advocate for policies that work for Vermont's farmers and consumers.

Over the last month or so, the policy agenda at NOFA has been action-packed. On my first day on the job, I attended a listening session at Vermont Law School where FDA presented its second round of rules for the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). FDA officials heard comments on the new rules for over two hours from farmers, food producers, and policy leaders from across the Northeast. In the coming weeks, I'll be working with NOFA's

policy team to develop our comments about how FDA can improve its rules so they are scale appropriate, less costly, more clear, and based on a realistic assessment of risk.

With Vermont's GMO labeling law (Act 120) slated to take effect in 2016, the Attorney General's office is charged with developing rules to guide its implementation and enforcement. Starting in October, the AG's office has requested input from the general public and key stakeholders, including NOFA-VT and other member organizations of the VT Right to Know Coalition. As part of my policy work with NOFA, I will be participating in the rulemaking process for Act 120 in the coming months and keeping our members informed about opportunities for public input. While they work to develop rules for Act 120, the Attorney General's office is also busy defending the law against a suit brought by big food manufacturers and industry trade groups. Though NOFA doesn't have a direct role in defending Act 120, I will be working to keep our members up to date with the latest news and calls to action as

the lawsuit progresses.

As I write this, Vermont's GMO labeling law is also being threatened on the federal level by HR.4432, otherwise known as the DARK (Deny Americans the Right to Know) Act. Introduced by Rep. Mike Pompeo of Kansas, the DARK Act would preempt states' attempts to require GMO labeling and would effectively wipe Vermont's historic legislation off the map.

Though the DARK Act has had very little support thus far in Washington, analysts have said the newly elected Republican controlled Congress may be more receptive. On December 10th, while the U.S. House of Representatives held hearings on the DARK Act, leaders from Vermont joined protesters from around the country in D.C. to speak out against the DARK Act and defend our right to know.

I'll be keeping my ear to the ground on these and other policy issues in the weeks and months to come and I'll continue to share important policy news with you. Stay tuned, stay in touch, and stay involved. 🌱

Farmer HR: Conflict on the Team

By Mimi Arnstein, Farm Business Consultant

This winter NOFA-VT in collaboration with Vermont Technical College is offering a series of intensive workshops on labor management skills for farmers. Farm profitability studies repeatedly show that “management” is the #1 indicator of success. Management: that nuanced element, more art than science, hard to put a finger on. Research also consistently shows that labor is one of the highest expenses, and typically it is the highest by a long shot. Therefore Labor Management combines the top indicator of success with the top expense on a farm.

Want to be successful? Focus on labor management. Learn about increasing productivity while reducing expenses. Join us for NOFA-VT and Vermont Tech’s intensive winter Labor Management and Human Resources Workshop Series. Attend all three workshops for a thorough training (and receive a certificate of completion from Vermont Tech), or choose the individual workshop that fits your need. Whether you are a beginner or advanced producer, in dairy or horticulture, employ a crew of 20 or are hiring for the first time, join us for farmer panels, communication style quizzes and featured speakers from Vermont and beyond. For more information on the series and to register, see www.nofavt.org/farmerHR.

The following was contributed by Chris Dutton, Vermont Technical College:



I have employee issues in my head at all times. I have spent the past 10 years fully immersed in managing a revolving workforce of fifty 18 to 24 year-olds with a minimum of a 50% annual turnover rate. To allow all interested students the chance to contribute to Vermont Tech’s farm operations, we must operate our modest dairy farm as if it had the workforce of the largest agribusiness in the state. Keeping milking procedures consistent among 27 different milkers while still producing high quality milk is no easy task. As farmers with employees, it is critical that we recognize that we are educators and managers, as well as producers.

The other day while I was off the farm speaking at a high school, there was almost a fist fight between two new employees at my barn (by definition I always have new employees). The issue was resolved and everybody was working smoothly together the next day. This gave me the opportunity to highlight to the crew that communication is always about work and not about people. Fighting wasn’t going to get them home after the morning milking and eating

breakfast any sooner. They recognized that they were still performing well and meeting the farm’s stated mission and goals, despite differences. Common objectives and keeping our focus on the big picture is critical for an effective workforce.

Our overall management objective is to maximize farm output as well as long term profits. We can best do so with a happy, productive team. This includes direct communication, a clearly stated mission, and attention to building a team environment. At times, these are very difficult things to do.

At the upcoming NOFA-VT March workshop, Conflict on the Team: Effective Leadership and Communication with Farm Employees, I will honestly share our employee management struggles. I will share with you the strategies that have inspired me to be a better manager and communicator, and the systems that keep our team on track. Topics that may be discussed include:

- Why smartphones are awesome.
- Why smartphones are awful.
- Why is breakfast better compensation than money?
- How to yell in a whisper.
- How to make the most of a horribly menial task.
- Why it is okay, perhaps preferred, if no one is “friends.”
- Why great managers are generally described as “crabby” and “loveable.”

- How to quickly find bravery and strong words at critical moments.
- Why a mission is pretty important.
- How to take a vacation and actually sleep well.
- Why being silly is vital.

I choose to work in farm management for very selfish reasons. I enjoy work significantly more when the attitude around me is how I want it to be. With effective leadership and communication, I have critical input into that attitude and how to create a positive environment where the staff focuses on the work and the mission. Improving our abilities to become exceptional farm managers pays better than pretty much anything else we can do on the farm. A few changed words, a little self-control and some key strategies can make your team into one that can accomplish anything. 🌾

For more information:

- www.nofavt.org/farmerHR
- Raymond Tremblay, “Dairy Farming in Vermont.” Bulletin 617. Published by the Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Vermont and State Agricultural College, Burlington, VT. November 1960
- Northeast Dairy Farm Summary 2013. Prepared by Chris Langhton, Farm Credit East. May 2013

This series produced with support from Vermont Technical College, the Department of Labor, the Northeast Center for Risk Management Education, and USDA/NIFA under Award Number 2012-49200-20031.



Winter 2014 New Members

NOFA welcomes the following members who recently joined through VOF certification applications, summer workshops, and other events. Thank you for supporting Vermont organic agriculture!

New Members

- Priscilla Backman, E Calais
- Ali Berlow, Putney
- Kimberly Dorn, Plowshare Farm, NH
- Abel Fillion, Tunbridge
- Mark Florenz, NH
- Emma Helverson, Alliance for a Healthier Vermont, Montpelier
- Carrie Johnson, FL
- Jeffrey Knisely, Abundance Acres Farm, Andover
- Hilary Lambert, Proctor
- Leigh & Charlie Merinoff, NJ
- Didi Pershouse, Thetford Center
- Thora & Edward Pomicter, Shelburne
- Dillon Post, RI
- Ross Scatchard, Zoeola Pharm Farm, Stowe
- Karen Wagner, Greensboro Bend
- Hillary Warren, Winooski
- Jessie Witscher, Sudbury
- Meghan Young, Garlic Hill Farm, NH

New & Renewing Business Members

- American Meadows, Inc., Williston
- Back Road Foods, LLC, Halifax
- Ben & Jerry's Foundation, So. Burlington
- Capitol Grounds, Montpelier
- Cedar Circle Farm, East Thetford
- Champlain Valley Compost, Charlotte
- Deep Root Organic Co-op, Johnson
- Drew's, LLC, Chester
- Franklin Foods, Inc., Enosburg Falls
- Green Mountain Distillers, LLC, Stowe
- Green Mountain Organic Creamery, Hinesburg
- Green Mountain Spinnery, Putney
- Harvest Market, Stowe
- Hen of the Wood, Burlington & Waterbury
- High Mowing Organic Seeds, Wolcott
- Hoopla Organics, LLC, Lincoln
- Hunger Mountain Co-op, Montpelier
- ImageTek Labels, Springfield
- Institute for Applied Agriculture & Food Systems (VTC), Randolph
- Jeff's Maine Seafood, St. Albans
- Johnny's Selected Seeds, ME
- Juniper, Burlington
- King Arthur Flour Co., Norwich
- Lazy Lady Farm, Westfield
- Lindstrom Farm, West Danville
- Metta Earth Institute, Inc., Lincoln
- Neighboring Food Co-op Association, MA
- New Day Farm, LLC, Manchester
- North Country Organics, Bradford
- O Bread, Shelburne
- Otter Creek Brewing Co., LLC, Middlebury
- People's United Bank, Brattleboro
- Pride's Capital, LLC, MA
- Pumpkin Village Foods, LLC, Burlington
- Red Hen Baking Co., Middlesex
- Retreat Maple Products, Richford
- Rhapsody Natural Foods, Inc., Cabot
- Rhino Foods, Inc., Burlington
- Stonyfield Farm, Inc., NH
- The Farmhouse Group, Burlington
- Two Bad Cats, LLC, Shrewsbury
- Upper Valley Food Coop, White River Jct.
- Urban Moonshine, Burlington
- Vermont Agricultural Credit Corp., Montpelier
- Vermont Bread Company, Brattleboro
- Vermont Coffee Company, Middlebury
- Vermont Compost Company, Montpelier
- Vermont Fresh Foods, Proctorsville
- Vermont Soap Co., Middlebury
- Wagatha's, Manchester Ctr.
- Wellscroft Fence Systems, LLC, NH
- Wild Branch Foods, Charlotte

Winter 2014 Program Supporters

Thank you to recent donors:

- \$912 from individual donations to support the Farm Share Program as part of Share the Harvest
- \$13,500 from 55 participating businesses for the annual Share the Harvest fundraiser
- Judith Buechner, \$250 membership and general donation
- King Arthur Flour, \$3,589, 1% for the Planet, general donation
- Hunger Mountain Cooperative, \$80 register donations for the Farm Share Program
- Vermont Community Foundation, \$500 grant as advised by Aaron J and Barbarina M Heyerdahl in honor and celebration of the marriage of Emily May and Daniel Kane

Program Grants:

- Organic Valley \$4,100 for on farm commercial dairy workshops, and sponsorship of NOFA Notes, the 2015 VOF Farm & Food Guide, and the 2015 Winter Conference
- Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, \$2,050 sponsor NOFA Farm to Community Mentor fieldtrip grants in Addison County.
- Newman's Own Foundation, \$45,000 towards a 2 year total grant of \$90,000 for Food For All.
- USDA, \$34,015 one year contract for Sound and Sensible Organic Certification Models and Outreach
- Vermont Land Trust, \$150 cosponsor Summer Workshop
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, \$1,500 for Farmers Market Promotion
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, \$42,607 for Organic Specialty Crop Cost of Production: Assessment & Education
- Vermont Community Foundation, \$2,000 for the Farm Share program as advised by Ronald J. Miller
- Vermont Community Foundation, \$4,000 from the Green Mountain Fund to support NOFA Vermont's Farm to Community Mentor Program
- Vermont Housing Conservation Board, \$117,600 contract under the VT Farm & Forest Viability Program

New VOF Certifications



Vermont Organic Farmers would like to welcome the following new producers who have recently obtained organic certification for all or a portion of their operation, joining the nearly 600 organic farmers and processors throughout the state.

Learn more about the benefits of certified organic, locally grown at www.nofavt.org/why-organic.

- Bear Roots Farm, LLC, Barre
- Cedar Creek Farm, Danville
- Foote Farm, Charlotte
- Harris Family Farm, Westport
- Keene Farm, Marshfield
- Mount Mansfield Maple Products, Colchester
- Northeast Kingdom Processing, St. Johnsbury
- Osgood Farm, Corinth
- Glen & Corrie Packard, Jeffersonville
- Sweet Georgia P's, Pittsfield
- Tajeanus Greens, Herbs & Produce, Swanton
- Twin Ponds Medicinal Herb Farm, Brookfield

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Upcoming NOFA-VT Events

Human Resource Skill Building for Farmers

www.nofavt.org/farmerHR

Session One: Get Your Team

January 14, 2015 • Randolph

January 15, 2015 • Williston

Session Two: Run Your Team

February 3, 2015 • Middlebury

February 4, 2015 • Norwich

Session Three: Conflict on the Team

March 5, 2015 • Randolph

March 6, 2015 • Williston

The NOFA-VT Winter Conference

February 14-16, 2015

University of Vermont, Burlington

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