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The Quarterly Newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

The Future of Dairy in Vermont

by Ashley Green, VOF Certification Specialist, and Sam Fuller, NOFA Vermont Technical Assistance Program Coordinator

This article is part of a series we're calling "The Perfect, the Good, and the Possible," exploring the challenges and innovations of certified organic and the local foods movement.

It's an early August morning, the air is thick with humidity and though you tossed on a flannel shirt, it'll soon be shed as the sun intensifies and heats up the day. You glance out the window at the lush green hills coated in dew. There's an older wooden barn that you are approaching on the road's side.

From behind the barn, a farmer steps into the road and flags you to stop as his herd of dairy cows begins to cross the road to their daily pasture allotment. You watch the string of cows amble across the road, and the farmer follows the herd along the laneway on the other side of the road. Of the 200 certified organic dairy operations in the state, it's possible that it was farmer Mathieu Choiniere that you were observing on this particular day.

Mathieu Choiniere is a twenty-year-old third-generation dairy farmer from the Choiniere Family Farm in Highgate, VT. Choiniere Family Farm has been certified since 2005 and ships milk with Organic Valley (also known as the CROPP cooperative). Choiniere graciously took some time from his class schedule at Vermont Technical College to talk with us about his experiences organic dairy farming in Vermont and what he sees in its future.

Showing resilience amidst decreasing numbers of Vermont dairy operations, the Vermont organic dairy industry numbers have remained relatively steady since 2007. The organic dairy industry now represents 20% of all dairies in the state.

Photo courtesy Choiniere Family Farm



For the farmers that transitioned to organic certification during the downturn of the conventional dairy market, many claim it has been a driving factor keeping them in business. Choiniere Family Farm is one such example. Certification for farms, such as Choiniere Family Farm, provided market access to the growing organic sector.

The rise of organic dairy farms in Vermont is often credited to innovative individuals and farmers as well as the dedication of Vermont dairy farmers to organic. One example of innovation to support organics is the Generation Organic (or Gen-O) program created by the CROPP Cooperative. Gen-O is a community of young CROPP member-owners or owners' children, ages 16-35 years old. The community group was created to support leadership development and educational, marketing, and networking opportunities for Gen-Os.

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Summer Thoughts from Enid

Since last fall, NOFA-VT has been participating in cultural competency training in the We All Belong program as the host of an Americorps volunteer. I have really appreciated the opportunity to learn more about change theory, and in the context of NOFA-VT, think differently about what change we seek from those who we touch with our work, and how we can be most successful in achieving that.

One of the resources we are using is a book called *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, by Chip and Dan Heath. The basic message of the book is that knowledge does not necessarily lead to changed behavior; rather, feeling is the major driver of change. So, as an example, the knowledge that eating more fruits and vegetables is good for our health may not, in itself, change an individual's behavior – they will need an experience or a feeling to motivate that change. I realized that much of our work at NOFA has to do with connecting different parts of the food system to create those meaningful experiences. If a child, participating in a farm to school program, visits a farm where they harvest red cabbage, then they are more likely to try that cabbage when it is served in their school lunch. A consumer who develops a relationship with a farmer is more likely to increase the amount of local food they purchase.

Two recent “change events” NOFA-VT participated in have made me reflect on these ideas of change theory. First, we were instrumental in successfully passing legislation in Vermont that will require the mandatory labeling of products that contain genetically modified ingredients. One inspiring change-maker we worked with is Brigid Armbrust, an 11-year-old from West Hartford, VT. Brigid started her own organization, called KidsCareVT, to engage her peers in an old-fashioned letter writing campaign. Every month, she organized kids across Vermont and many other states to write letters to legislators, the Attorney General, and the Governor.

“I feel like we shouldn't let people eat something that they don't know what they're eating,” said Brigid. “If they feel that young people are interested, it just has a much stronger feel, in my opinion.” The efforts of Brigid and many other passionate advocates appealed to voters' and legislative leaders' need for both knowledge and feeling. Many legislators reported that they had never received so many comments from their constituents on any issue.

The second event I recently participated in was the National Organic Standards Board meeting in San Antonio, Texas at the end of April. In contrast to the process of passing the labeling law in VT, the process of making change in the National Organic Program, especially the decision-making modeled at the meeting, was not an example of effective change. It made me realize the need for greater public involvement in the National Organic Program – especially greater involvement from the NOFAs, organizations with deep history in organic and significant farmer leadership.

Nicole Dehne (VOF Certification Director) tells the story of the meeting on page 4, so I don't want to expound on that here; the point I want to make is that we have to be at the table. We have a critical voice, and we are part of a change culture in Vermont that recognizes the need for both knowledge and feeling to effect change.

Part of the reason we host summer workshops and Celebrate Your Farmer Socials around the state is to create experiences where members and non-members can create a deeper understanding and connection to their food producers, making change together for a stronger, more sustainable food system. I look forward to seeing you at one or more of our upcoming events.

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.

NOFA Vermont Summer Workshop Series Preview

By Barbara Richardson, NOFA Vermont Office Manager

Want to learn how to grow nuts in your backyard, gain insights on improving pasture rotations, tour a keenly efficient poultry operation, or join a feast celebrating food, farming and community? Our 2014 Summer Workshop Series lineup features more than two dozen on-farm opportunities like these where gardeners, homesteaders and commercial farmers can gain practical knowledge, exchange ideas, and enjoy time together. The workshops below are just a sampling; check the brochure mailed to members in early July, or www.nofavt.org/sws for the full line-up of 30 workshops and socials.

Biodiversity is a theme in several workshops for gardeners and homesteaders. East Hill Tree Farm in Plainfield will host a tour and workshop on Fruits & Nuts for the Edible Landscape, where Nicko Rubin's permaculture training frames his approach to producing delicious and nutritious crops on challenging sites and soils. In Starksboro, Wendy Sue Harper and Marijke Niles will welcome you to Marijke's Perennial Gardens Plus for a focus on designing diverse habitats that attract pollinators, pest-controlling beneficial insects – and people, too. And Sylvia Davatz of Solstice Seeds in Harland invites

gardeners with some seed saving experience to advance their skills and knowledge at her Intermediate Seed Saving workshop.

The slate of workshops for commercial produce farmers is wide-ranging. Ben Waterman of Johnson will discuss the ins and outs of starting a commercial blueberry operation, from mycorrhizae inoculation through pest control and irrigation. Beginning farmers will be introduced to an array of options and advice at the Tractors, Tools and Tricks for Mechanical Cultivation at Digger's Mirth in Burlington's Intervale. The season closes appropriately with a look at season extension and root cellaring for winter CSAs and farmers' markets with Suzanne Long and Tom Sanford of Luna Bleu Farm in South Royalton. All commercial vegetable and berry workshops will be attended by Vern Grubinger, vegetable and berry specialist at the University of Vermont Extension.

Livestock farmers will be treated to a couple of intensive workshops: Bruce Hennessy and Beth Whiting of Maple Wind Farm in Huntington share insights gained during the significant growth of their operation at Efficient



Participants set up a fall square-foot garden in this 2013 workshop.

Poultry Production & Processing, while Nancy LaRowe and Matt Yesman of Hogwash Farm discuss improvements they've made in their workshop, Producing Better Pork: Genetics & Management. Dairies and other grazing operations will benefit from two Grazing School pasture walks offered by farm advisor Sarah Flack, who will cover pasture design and layout, stocking density, and much more, as well as a series of workshops titled Making the Most of Your Forages, offered in conjunction with the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

NOFA is at heart an organization focused on forging connections in support of a food system that is ecologically sound and economically viable, and our NOFAvore Socials are a key place for eaters and producers to connect. At these socials, farmers offer tours and share information about their operations, followed by a feast of pizza topped with produce from the farm and baked on the spot in our mobile wood-fired oven. Seven farms throughout the state are planning to host these special gatherings.

Remember, this is just a taste – check the brochure or website for more. We hope to see you out there! 🍷

More info: www.nofavt.org/sws



Attendees tour Essex Farm in this 2013 workshop.

What is the NOSB and why should you care?

By Nicole Dehne, Vermont Organic Farmers Certification Administrator

Defining what it means to farm organically has never been easy. In Vermont, in the early years of the organic movement, when farmers would meet to discuss and characterize what it meant to farm organically, they sometimes disagreed. Minutes from some of these early farmer meetings demonstrate that people often had contradictory opinions about what materials should be allowed for use on organic crops and animals. So it shouldn't be surprising that people still disagree today. However, the venue has changed dramatically, from small

as to discuss a number of topics that impact organic farming and processing. For example, the board's most recent meeting agenda covered a variety of topics including organic aquaculture and creating guidance for retailers of organic food to obtain certification.

Both NOFA Vermont and VOF send staff representatives to these meetings on behalf of Vermont farmers, processors, and consumers. However, anyone who wishes to participate can do so by following the discussions and submitting comments to the NOSB. Farmer



Making Changes

An example of a topic from the recent NOSB meeting that illustrates this tension is a provision known as "sunset." The sunset provision governs the gradual elimination of approved synthetic substances. Currently, some synthetic substances are approved for use in organic products, usually due to a lack of natural alternatives. These allowances automatically expire after a period of time unless extended by a two-thirds vote of the NOSB.

The NOP published a final rule before the recent NOSB meeting making major changes to the sunset provision, requiring instead a two-thirds majority to *remove* a product. This issue incited protests from consumer groups at the NOSB meeting where chants of "Don't change sunset" rang through the meeting halls. What angered many people about these changes was that the NOP never solicited public comment before trying to implement these major modifications.

In addition, the sunset provision was originally created with the intent that it should be easier for the board to remove materials from use than to keep them as allowed, presumably encouraging the industry to move away from synthetic materials whenever possible.

On the other hand, many people feel that the NOP's changes

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Important changes to the organic regulations are happening every year and it is within your grasp, as a farmer or consumer, to make your voice heard.

groups of farmers gathering together over a potluck meal, to the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) facilitating the process of defining the organic standards at National Organic Standards Board meetings around the country.

People often make two assumptions about the NOP and the regulations that define organic farming. The first is that the organic standards are static and unchanging. The second is that having a voice at the table where these discussions and changes are happening is difficult or impossible. I would argue that both of these assumptions are false. I believe that important changes to the organic regulations are happening every year and it is within your grasp, as a farmer or consumer, to make your voice heard.

The venue where many of these discussions take place is the bi-annual National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting. This board meets to review materials allowed for use on organic farms or in organic food, as well

input is particularly valued. (See website list at the end of this article for more resources.)

The NOSB is comprised of 15 members: 4 farmers, 3 environmentalist/resource conservationists, 3 consumer/public interest advocates, 2 handlers/processors, one retailer, one scientist, and one USDA-accredited certifying agent.

These different positions are meant to represent the diverse perspectives of the organic community. And as you might imagine, the NOSB members often have different opinions and priorities about what is best for the organic movement.

The tension on the board and in the room during the meetings is often between those who want to prioritize very strict standards and those who want to make sure that farms and processors have the tools they need to successfully produce organic food.

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improve the efficiency of the program. Prior to the change, the USDA addressed all changes to materials through rulemaking, which is a lengthy and involved process. The current process only involves rule-making if a material is removed from use. All substances that remain allowed will simply be announced through the NOP's regular channels of communication.

Many people support these improvements, as they feel streamlining this process will allow the NOP to focus on issues of more significance like developing animal welfare standards, addressing GMO contamination and better enforcing the existing organic regulations. In addition, many people feel that removing materials that are currently allowed in organic farming

and processing make it more difficult for organic producers as they must change their practices to adapt to the new standards.

Over the last few years, the current board has removed many materials that had previously been allowed for use. For example, many people felt that substances like tetracycline, used for treating fireblight in organic apple and pear orchards, and sodium nitrate, a natural nitrogen fertilizer, should not continue to be allowed in organic agriculture. While others felt that these were important tools needed by organic farmers, the board voted to remove them from the approved substances list.

Right now, consumer groups have gained a strong voice in these

meetings, and part of our job at VOF is to represent the interests of our farmers. Though they are sometimes in conflict, all the parties at NOSB meetings are trying to work towards a better organic program. And of course, these disagreements and tensions are not new – they are now just happening on a larger stage. What we need more than anything is more respect for the opposite opinion and a presentation of the issues in a balanced and unbiased manner. That would really allow the organic community to make the best decisions for our farmers and our consumers. 🌱

For more information on the organic standards, visit www.nofavt.org/vof

For more information on the NOP, the NOSB, the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances, and how you can get involved, visit www.ams.usda.gov/nop

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Diggers Mirth, Burlington

photo by J.Silverman

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Organic Opportunities

Choiniere is a Northeast representative of the Generation Organic executive committee. He admits that there may be fewer youth going into dairy farming than when his father, Guy Choiniere, was starting out. However, based on his experiences with the Gen-O community, Choiniere is confident that an encouraging future is ahead for those who are choosing organic dairy farming. He sees organizations like Gen-O as helpful in providing assistance, networking, and industry appeal to the upcoming generation of dairy farmers.

In 2013, Gen-O established a nationwide organic education program, dubbed the “Teach-in.” Participants in the Gen-O network visited local school groups in late October and shared their farms’ stories as well as lessons about the importance of organics for health from the ground up.

“The first step towards a healthier future for our society is to ensure people have the information they need to make educated decisions about what they eat,” says Choiniere of his participation in this activity. “This is most critical for young children.”

“Give a farmer a dollar, and he’ll probably put 80 cents back into the local economy.”

Choiniere suggests that farmers support the local economy in more ways than their final product. “Give a farmer a dollar, and he’ll probably put 80 cents back into the local economy by purchasing supplies from the local farm supply store, hiring local labor, buying feed from local feed companies and so forth.”

In addition, the organic dairy industry contributes to Vermont’s bucolic working landscape that draws income in

The Choiniere family. Photo courtesy Choiniere Family Farm



the forms of tourism, recreation, and Vermont-made processed products.

The overall impact of the Vermont organic dairy industry requires a wider view to the regional level. The majority of Vermont dairy producers ship organic milk with a fluid milk buyer (Horizon, Organic Valley, or Stonyfield). These buyers have regional processing and distribution sites that provide milk and processed dairy products to the greater Northeast population, serving approximately 14 million. It is estimated that Vermont

supplies nearly 62% of all milk consumed in the Northeast.

Organic milk producers sign a long-term contract with their milk buyer. This contract ensures a stable milk price for farmers as opposed to the fluctuating national and international market prices that farmers are subject to on the conventional market. Additionally, milk buyers often build in “pay price incentives” that reward

farmers for measures such as milk quality or high milk production during seasonal periods when demand is greater than supply. A number of certified farmers credit their continued success to this stable pricing; they believe that they would otherwise be out of business due to the uncertainties of the conventional market.

As Vermont continues to expand its abilities and achieve its goals of supporting a local and regional food system, the regional distribution of milk is an interesting model for other farmers and distributors. The structure of a multi-farm business (or cooperative in the case of Organic Valley) gives more resilience in the supply stream and allows the product processing and distribution to be centralized closer to population centers and regions of higher demand. Additionally, as demonstrated by the organic milk contract, it can be designed to set a fixed product price for farmers, potentially alleviating some of the risks of production.

Challenges of the Organic Dairy Industry

Despite the advantages of the organic dairy contract, for organic dairy producers there remain a number of challenges that limit profitability.

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Getting into dairy farming is difficult due to high cost of initial investments in cattle, land, infrastructure, and equipment. There are also challenges to navigating the transition of farms from one generation to the next.

One recent analysis of the economics of working organic dairy farms in Vermont showed the greatest expenses to be feed (nearly 300% greater than other expenses), repairs and supplies, labor, and depreciation. Northeast dairy producers are subject to market fluctuations in feed grain prices because so much of it is grown outside the region. Organic grain prices have been on the rise for several years, probably because of high demand and a tight supply due to weather extremes, high fuel costs, and low federal incentives for grain producers to grow organically.

Making a profit despite high expenses requires dairy farmers to maximize their production while minimizing their inputs. Conventional wisdom is for operations to scale-up to increase total production. However, a number of certified farmers have found that they are able to maintain their scale, typically small relative to many conventional operations, and still achieve financial viability.

Bob Parsons, a University of Vermont professor and extension economist, has been studying the economics of certified Vermont dairy operations since 1999. He's found several patterns when farms are categorized by profit group. The high-profit group of organic dairies averages the highest feed costs and total expenses (particularly for labor and repairs and supplies) per cow.

These high-profit dairies are achieving net return over purchased feed and other costs by maximizing milk production per cow and achieving milk

quality incentives that provide them with a high milk price. The high-profit dairies in Parson's study have adopted practices to minimize the costs of fuel and custom hire (such as for haying), and depreciation expenses, which are significant burdens for lower-profit dairies.

Future for Organic Dairy in VT

Choiniere feels that the future for organic dairy is encouraging. Consumers continue to demand more transparency, safety and health benefits from their food, and he sees organic as the solution that fulfills all of these demands. Organic milk is often touted as a "gateway product" that introduces customers to the organic marketplace.

The increased demand and sales of organic milk have led to increases in the pay price to organic farmers. Still, less than 40% of the final shelf price for organic milk is paid directly to the farmer, based on the Vermont organic annual pay price of \$33/cwt (January 2014) and the reported shelf price for organic milk in the Northeast at \$6.99/gallon (March 2014).

Some dairy farmers in Vermont have considered launching their own

bottling facilities or value-added dairy product lines to maximize their earnings. Choiniere sees making yogurt or cheese as a potential option for his farm. He acknowledges the intimacy of producers and consumers in Vermont and the high consumer demand for local product, which makes it easier for farmers to market products.

Choiniere's is optimistic about the many opportunities before him. He suggests that his biggest challenges "will probably be getting used to waking up early in the morning after sleeping in the whole year at college." He continues, like a true farmer, "And the weather. The weather is always on a different schedule than you are." ❁

Show your support for Vermont's organic dairy producers. Look for the following brands at your local co-op, grocery, or farmers' market:

Organic Valley, Stonyfield Farm, Horizon, Butterworks Farm, Does' Leap, Kimball Brook Farm, Neighborly Farms, Scholten Family Farm, Strafford Organic Creamery, Thistle Hill Farm, von Trapp Farmstead, Dahlicious Lassi, and organic cheeses produced by Champlain Valley Creamery, VT Farmstead Cheese Co., and the Cellars at Jasper Hill

Organic Dairy by the Numbers

Economic contribution:

- \$34 million gross state product sales annually in Vermont
- 800 Vermont jobs; equivalent of \$26 million in labor costs from 2008-2010
- In 2006, approximately 2% of total fluid milk sales in the US were organic
- In 2013, approximately 4% of total fluid milk sales in the US were organic

Number of Vermont Organic Dairy Farms

- **2000:** 47 farms
2% of all Vermont dairies
- **2007:** 204 farms
18% of all Vermont dairies
2% of all Vermont farms
- **2013:** 198 farms
20% of all Vermont dairies
2% of all Vermont farms

2014 Journey Farmers

By Caitlin Jenness, NOFA Vermont Beginning Farmer Coordinator and Revolving Loan Fund Administrator

The NOFA Vermont Journey Farmer Program is a two-year business planning support program available for Vermont's beginning farmers. It was started in 2012 as part of a collaboration with five other NOFA chapters and funded by the USDA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program.

To date, NOFA-VT has accepted 26 farms into the program. Journey Farmers are chosen based on the strength of their business model based on previous production experience, understanding of markets, and secured access to land, as well as a commitment to run a commercial operation in Vermont. Each year, NOFA receives about 5 times the number of applications as there are available spots. While it is challenge to narrow the pool, it is a good challenge to have as it underscores the energy, enthusiasm, and diversity of new agricultural businesses that are starting all over the state.

Through the Journey Farmer program, NOFA-VT hopes to offer the next generation of Vermont's sustainable and organic farmers support and information at a crucial time of business start-up. Journey farmers receive access to mentorship from experienced farmers, an educational stipend, free attendance to workshops and conferences, and direct business planning support and technical assistance from the NOFA office. Journey Farmers are then able to work one on one with farmer mentors throughout the growing season, attend workshops and conferences for free, and get direct support and feedback on different aspects of their business.

In 2014, NOFA-VT accepted 10 farmers, representing six farms with operations ranging from diversified vegetables to geese and grain producers. The direct relationship formed with Journey Farmers is incredibly valuable for the NOFA office staff, as we are able to stay current with the issues and challenges facing beginning farmers, receive input about workshop and grant ideas, and also, in general, be buoyed by the energy that comes with working with these beginning farmers.

Flywheel Farm, Woodbury, VT

Justin Cote & Ansel Ploog

Flywheel Farm is run by Justin Cote and Ansel Ploog. Located on Woodbury Lake, Flywheel Farm produces certified organic mixed fruits and vegetables on three acres. Justin and Ansel began farming in Maine as apprentices on a large organic market farm and have since worked for a few of the many great New England farmers. They currently sell through a farmstand on Route 14, to local restaurants, coops, and institutions, and through distributors.

Flywheel Farm hopes to contribute to the development of regional supply-chain relationships to increase the distribution of Vermont-grown foods around the Northeast. They love working with buyers to find the produce they need while managing their small acreage with fertility, production and efficiency in mind. The 2014 season will be their second in production.

Four Pillars Farm, Whiting, VT

Peter Cousineau

Peter Cousineau started Four Pillars Farm in 2011 out of a desire to serve a broader spectrum of people with healthy, organic produce. He moved to Vermont in 1997 and started a landscaping business where he designed, built, and maintained high-end gardens.

The desire to grow vegetables was always in the back of Peter's mind, and when a property with the soil and other qualities he was looking for became available, he knew it was time to follow that dream. Four Pillars Farm cultivates four acres of diverse vegetables mainly for wholesale markets, and is now starting to go beyond the concepts of organic and sustainable into permaculture with the goal of creating land that is regenerative.

Good Heart Farmstead, Worcester, VT

Katie Spring & Edge Fuentes

Good Heart Farmstead is run by husband and wife Edge Fuentes and Katie Spring. They met working on an educational nonprofit farm in Ester, Alaska, and moved back to Vermont in 2010. This will be their second season running a vegetable CSA and raising Icelandic sheep and layer and broiler chickens.

With a limited amount of cropland, they focus on bio-intensive and nutrient-dense growing methods to increase production. Their farm mission is to grow healthy, whole foods and to make them available to people of all income levels, increasing the accessibility of local food to low-income Vermonters – strengthening the community through food, and promoting creativity, communication, peace, and learning through a direct connection to the land and the food we eat.

Gozzard City, Cabot, VT

Wesley Bascom

Gozzard City produces high quality, pastured geese marketed directly to restaurants and individuals. In 2013, they raised 150 geese, and in 2014 are expanding their geese flock while exploring the addition of other waterfowl and game birds for meat and egg production.

Wesley Bascom, a founding partner and principal operator of Gozard City, grew up on a multi-generational dairy farm in the Connecticut River Valley and attended UVM. After running his own design-build company, Demeter Design-Build, for a few years, in 2013 he started Gozard City with partners David Huck and, now, Suzanne Podhaiser. Gozard City is one of several cooperative enterprises sharing the 160 acres of pasture and woodland at the old Menard farmstead in Cabot, VT.

MR Sol Farm, Grand Isle, VT

Gregg Sol and Dave McGregor

MR Sol Farm represents a partnership between two formerly independent businesses: Grand Isle's MR Harvest and Charlotte's Sol Fresh Farm. During the summer of 2013, Dave McGregor and Greg Sol met at the South Burlington Farmers Market, and faced with land tenure and production challenges imposed by the wet growing season, decided one farm was better than two.

MR Sol Farm is located in Grand Isle. Together they cultivate close to 15 acres for a 100-member CSA, farmers' markets, hospitals, Healthy Living, local restaurants, and local schools. They work closely with the South Burlington Farm to School program, Common Roots, as well as the Milton School District, and hope to expand into other schools.

Rogers Farmstead, Berlin, VT

Nate & Jessie Rogers

Rogers Farmstead is a small family farm on 133 acres just four miles from downtown Montpelier. They have been in operation since 2012 growing cereal grains and hay, and raising animals for raw milk, eggs, and meat. Their animals are all pasture based and supplemented with non-GMO grains to maintain optimal health. They use organic and sustainable practices to manage their land along the Dog River in Berlin. Their products are sold direct from the farm, at farmers' markets and available at nearby co-ops. 🌱

Journey Farmer applications are accepted annually. For more information, visit www.nofavt.org/journey-farmer or call 802-434-4122.



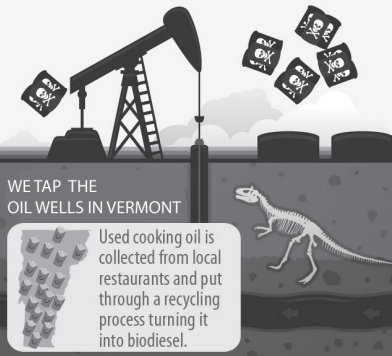
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Continuous Harvest: A Succession Planting "How-To"

By Holly Simpson, High Mowing Organic Seeds

Succession planting can play a significant role in maximizing the usable space in your garden. As soon as you harvest one crop, the next crop can be seeded or transplanted in that soil. Using the succession planting method can also extend your growing season in either spring or fall. Identifying appropriate cool season and warm season crops is the first step to planning for the season.

Vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, radishes, peas (shell, snap, or snow), salad green mixes, beets and scallions can be direct seeded in early spring, as they mature quickly. Seedlings of broccoli, early cabbages, mustard greens and even kales and collards can be transplanted at this time too. Onion sets and potatoes also require cooler temperatures to become established. All of the crops listed above

can withstand a light frost. Using row cover fabrics, cloches or cold frames insulates the soil to maintain a temperature of 50-55 degrees.

As soon as the cool season crops have been harvested and the last frost date has passed, pull out the plants and have your warm season crops ready to go. Starting warm season seedlings of melons, eggplant, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, chard, celery, summer and winter squash, etc., to transplant will give you a head start. In the late summer, one to two months before serious frosts (July to mid-August in our area of northern Vermont), plant another round of cool season crops. The following items will be fine with light to harder frosts: beets, Chinese cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, endive, kale, kohlrabi, radishes, spinach, turnips and lettuce.

Also, for continuous harvests, another simple method of succession planting would be to make several plantings of the same crop. For example, green beans can be planted every 2 weeks from mid-May thru mid-August, or transplant broccoli and cauliflower starts every two to three weeks for sequential harvests.

Make a chart with all the vegetables that you wish to produce more of. Once the chart is complete for the first season, you will find it easy to modify the following years.

Using either of these methods will feel very rewarding and allow you plenty of vegetables for fresh eating but also for canning and freezing to keep the harvest edible year round. 🌱

This article first appeared on the High Mowing Organic Seeds website: www.highmowingseeds.com

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Lessons Learned

By Dave Rogers, former NOFA-VT Policy Advisor

How did Vermont manage to do it when other states have tried and failed? What led to the enactment of a strong, first-in-the nation law that requires the labeling of GMO foods?

That's what national and international news media and GMO labeling advocates across the country have been asking ever since late April, when the Vermont legislature overwhelmingly passed H.122, a bill requiring the labeling of foods produced with genetic engineering. Governor Shumlin signed this historic legislation into law on May 8th in a high-profile ceremony on the steps of the Vermont Statehouse.

The Vermont legislature, after two years of in-depth testimony and difficult debate, overwhelmingly passed H.122, a bill requiring the labeling of foods produced with genetic engineering.

So, how did we do it?

A simple answer would be to call attention to the diverse organizations, businesses and individuals that joined the Governor that day for the signing and celebration – the Vermont Right To Know GMOs (VTRTK) Coalition, made up of NOFA Vermont, VPIRG, Rural Vermont and Cedar Circle Farm; the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic at Vermont Law School; Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility; Ben & Jerry's; Consumers Union; lead sponsors of H.112 in the House and Senate, Rep. Kate Webb and Senator David Zuckerman, and other supportive Vermont legislators; and the hundreds of Vermonters, young and old, who worked to build support for the law in communities throughout Vermont.

Over two years of campaigning, debate, and testimony, the sustained efforts of these and hundreds of other businesses and organizations, and

over 30,000 Vermonters who actively supported passage of H.112, resulted in one of the most effective political and grassroots campaigns ever seen in Vermont.

But how did such a diverse group of players in Vermont organize and maintain an effective coalition over several years, capable of defeating powerful and well-funded corporate interests? That is the question being asked by organizations and advocates in over twenty states, now working to enact their own GMO labeling laws.

In response, the VTRTK Coalition is preparing an organizing “toolkit” for use by others that discusses the lessons learned and main elements of success in the VTRTK Campaign. Briefly, they include:

- Identifying and recruiting key coalition members with needed skills and expertise
- Maintaining effective communications and resolving conflicts in diverse coalitions
- Developing and refining key messaging for use in public communications and grassroots mobilization
- Implementing proven techniques and strategies for political lobbying and working with elected officials
- Making effective use of social media and internet communication in building and maintaining grassroots support
- Developing diverse community-level education and organizing events
- Making effective use of publications

and media

- Identifying key content experts to provide testimony and support lobbying and media activities

We are hopeful that sharing Vermont's strategy in breaking the “labeling barrier” will lead to success in other states in the near future and, eventually, to the enactment of a strong federal GMO labeling law.

Future Action

It needs to be noted that the enactment of the GMO labeling law does not signal the end of the VTRTK Coalition's work. In the months ahead the Vermont Attorney General will be proposing for public comment, and then adopting, regulations that will guide the implementation of the law beginning in July 2016.

Also, as of early June, the Attorney General's office is preparing for an anticipated lawsuit brought against Vermont by large corporate food manufacturers seeking to overturn the law in federal court. The coalition is planning to directly participate in both of these developments and to keep supporters informed about how they may become involved through its webpage (vtrighttoknow.org) and social media. More information will be posted on NOFA's website and Facebook page as it becomes available. 🐿

A final note: This is my last NOFA Notes article. After eight very rewarding years with NOFA Vermont I am moving on to focus on family responsibilities and personal goals. It was a difficult decision. I will remain involved with food-related issues in Vermont and hope to cross paths with many NOFA members in the future. My deepest thanks and appreciation to everyone who has supported and encouraged me in my work.

—Dave Rogers

Summer 2014 New Members

NOFA welcomes the following members who recently joined through the NOFA Winter Conference, Direct Market Conference, Bulk Order, gift memberships, website, VOF certification applications, and other events.

Thank you for supporting Vermont organic agriculture!

New Members

- Timothy Allen, Allen Brothers, Westminster
- Charis Boke, Putney
- Jacki Brook, Putney
- Shaun Brooks, St. Albans Bay
- Mary Bryant, Thetford Ctr.
- James DeWeese, Middlebury
- Brendan Driscoll, Cobbler Hill Farm, LLC, Cambridge
- Travis Eurburn, Barton
- Leslie, Gensberg, E. Burke
- Patrick Giantonio, Keene Farm, Marshfield
- Yves Gonnet, Midnight Goat Farm, Huntington
- Laura Hecht, Marlboro
- Jennifer & Zachary Johnson, Twin Ponds Medicinal Herb Farm, Brookfield
- Emily Laine, So. Royalton
- Alissa Matthews, PA
- Stephen Mayer, Shelburne
- Georgia LoPresti Meckes, Bondville
- Jennifer & Nicholas Merritt, E. Fairfield
- Darsey Moon, Stowe
- Steve Paddock, Middlebury
- Benjamin Pauly, Woodstock Inn & Resort, Woodstock
- James Ruma, MA
- Christina Scanlon, Westford
- Sheila Trask, Randolph

New & Renewing Business Members

- ADAK Farm Systems
- Aines Farm/Mettowee Valley Maple
- Corner Rail Fence Company, Inc.
- Craftsbury Outdoor Center
- Dow's Crossing Farm, LLC
- Farmers to You
- Farmstand at the Cobble
- Field House Botanicals
- Green Mountain College
- Green Mountain Organic Creamery
- Henderson's Tree & Garden
- High Ponds Farm
- Highland Sugarworks, Inc.
- Hill Top Farm
- Hillcrest Foods, Inc.
- Houde Family Farm
- Howvale Farm
- Lake Champlain Islands Agriculture Network
- Laraway Youth & Family Center
- Merck Forest & Farmland Center
- Myers Produce
- Olivia's Crouton Company
- On Farm Focus
- Orange Southwest Supervisory Union
- Putney Farmers' Market
- Quarry Road Farms, Inc.
- Raven Croft Books
- Sjolander Family Farm
- Sugarsnap
- Sumptuous Syrups of VT
- The American Society of Dowsers
- Vermont School of Herbal Studies
- Willsboro Farm, Cornell University
- Windstone Farm

Summer 2014 Program Supporters

Thank you to recent donors:

- Butternut Mountain Farm, \$250 for the Farm to Community Mentor Program
- Helen Brennan, \$500 for the Farm Share Program for CSA shares for limited income Vermonters at Wild Carrot Farm
- Adam Dosz, \$250 for the Farm Share Program
- Lawrence Hamilton, \$1,000 for the Farm Share Program, including \$250 for CSA shares for limited income Vermonters at Stony Loam Farm
- Mike & Sarah Hudson, \$400 for the Farm Share Program for limited income Vermonters at Pete's Greens
- Vermont Coffee Company, \$600 for the Farm to Community Mentor Program, proceeds from the coffee donations at the NOFA Winter Conference
- Vermont Farms! Association, \$250 to support the agritourism workshop and marketing coaching sessions at the Direct Marketing Conference

Program Grants:

- Extension Risk Management Education, \$26,500 for "Managing Human Risk on Vermont Organic Farms"
- Kitchen Gardeners International, \$500 KGI Sow it Forward grant to support the NOFA Vermont Educational Garden
- The Forrest & Frances Lattner Foundation, \$50,000 for program work
- The Windham Foundation, Inc., \$5,000 for the NOFA Vermont Farm to Community Mentor Program
- WhiteWave/Horizon Organic, \$2,000 to support NOFA Vermont's Dairy Technical Assistance Program
- Wholesome Wave, \$7,500 for Double Value Coupon Program
- Support for the Dairy Technical Assistance Program's Organic Dairy Study:
 - Green Mountain Feeds \$1,000
 - Morrison's Custom Feeds \$3,000
 - Stonyfield Farm, Inc. \$4,500
 - Vermont Agency of Agriculture \$1,500
 - Yankee Farm Credit \$1,000

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.

- Richard Clark, Greensboro Bend
- Allen Bros, Inc., Westminster
- Cobbler Hill Farm, Cambridge
- Depot Farm Supply, Whiting
- Flywheel Farm, E. Montpelier
- Hill Top Maple, St. Albans
- J & R Family Farm, North Troy
- Ledge View Maple, Jeffersonville
- Meadowbrook Acres, Inc., Milton
- Retreat Maple Products, Inc., Richford
- Rush's Family Farm, Fairfax
- Ryan's Maple Ridge Sugar House, E. Fairfield
- Slopeside Syrup, Richmond
- Stonyhill Sugarhouse, E. Fairfield
- The First Bird, N. Middlesex
- Woodstock Inn and Resort, Woodstock

The Cows are Walking Through the Forest

By Ross Thurber, NOFA Vermont board member and farmer, Lilac Ridge Farm, Brattleboro

In a ribbon of milk and pasturage
 Carried with sweet sacred habit

They keep to the dry hummocks above
 The spring seeps reaching for mouthfuls

Of Raspberry leaves and Witch Hazel
 Before arriving at the clearing

Morning fog rises and rises wraithlike
 Making new hills, new mountain ridges

That burn off leaving this old arable
 Hoof worn hill drenched with dew

The Cows are walking through the
 Forest leaving a trail of crushed

Needles before entering the maw
 Of a heavy summer day

Leaving me homesick
 For a departing dawn



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___ Business	\$50
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___ Sustainer	\$250
___ Basic*	\$15-25

*The Natural Farmer not included

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Upcoming NOFA-VT Events

Make It or Break It with Mid-Summer Organic Storage Crops

July 16, 2014 - 5:00pm - 7:00pm
Burnt Rock Farm, Huntington, VT

SolarFest

Look for the NOFA-VT table!
July 18, 2014 - July 20, 2014
12 McNamara Road, Tinmouth, VT

Making the Most of Your Forages: Grazing, Summer Annuals, and No-Grain Organic Dairy Production

July 18, 2014 - 10:30am - 2:30pm
Beidler Family Farm, Randolph Center, VT

Two-Day Fermentation Intensive with Sandor Katz

NOFA-VT is a sponsor; members receive discounted registration
July 22, 2014 - July 23, 2014
Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT

Intermediate Seed Saving

July 26, 2014 - 1:00pm - 3:30pm
Solstice Seeds, Hartland, VT

Celebrate Your Farmer Social at Blue Heron Farm

July 28, 2014 - 5:30pm - 7:30pm
Blue Heron Farm, Grand Isle, VT

Profitable Small Acreage Production

July 31, 2014 - 5:00pm - 7:00pm
High Ledge Farm, South Woodbury, VT

Shiitake Production: From Laying Yard to Market

August 2, 2014 - 1:00pm - 4:00pm
Tangled Roots Farm, Shrewsbury

Designing Your Farm Retail Space

August 5, 2014 - 5:00pm - 7:00pm
Killdeer Farm & Farm Stand, Norwich

Learn more, register, and see the whole upcoming events calendar at www.nofavt.org or call 802-434-4122.

Advertise in NOFA Notes and Support NOFA Vermont!

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- 1/8 pg - \$30 (3" w x 2.25" h)
- 1/6 pg - \$40 (2.25" w x 4.75" h)
- 1/4 pg - \$50 (3" w x 4.75" h)
- 1/2 pg - \$85 (7" w x 4.75" h)

