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The Quarterly Newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

# Heartbeat Lifesharing: A model for living and working in community together

By Enid Wonnacott, NOFA-VT Executive Director

My daughter and I drove up to the beautiful hill farm in Hardwick, on a gorgeous June day to bake pizza in NOFA’s oven for the annual Open House at Heartbeat Lifesharing, a community providing therapeutic care for adults with developmental disabilities. Co-founder Hannah Schwartz explained that the open house provides the opportunity, every year, to share what they are doing with their extended community; it is an example of her inclusive approach to community care giving.

One of the highlights of the open house was the opportunity for participants to see the new community center they have built on-site. Schwartz described that, “The new center will allow us to put on community theater where everyone is welcome.” She explained that although communities are growing in their awareness, what is perceived as a disruption

from the audience, especially in the arts and music, means that many of Heartbeat’s community members cannot attend performances. “We strive for a porous



Photo courtesy of Heartbeat Lifesharing.

relationship with our community, where everyone is welcome and invited, where there are no borders.”

Hannah Schwartz believes that the only way the world is going to change is if people with developmental disabilities, or friends as she calls them, are integrated with the community, not isolated. Whereas other therapeutic communities may model a sanctuary to care for their residents, Heartbeat wants to “model it out,” as

*“We strive for a porous relationship with our community, where everyone is welcome and invited, where there are no borders.”*  
- Hannah Schwartz

Hannah explains, by interfacing as much with the community as possible.

Many of Heartbeat’s friends work in businesses in the community – whether packing seeds at High Mowing, on the

wash stations at Pete’s Greens, or in the cheese room at Jasper Hill. In addition, they are a licensed Level 4 Community Residence in dialogue with agencies and providers within Vermont and nation-

Heartbeat Lifesharing, continued on page 3



# NOFA VERMONT

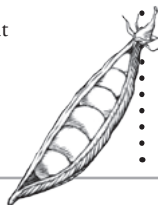
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# Fall Thoughts from Enid

One of my favorite NOFA-VT Board of Director meetings of the year is our mid-summer meeting where we brainstorm and ponder the theme for the Winter Conference. In advance of the meeting, the board members are asked to reflect on the issues that have been raised either nationally, statewide or on their farms and gardens. What are their farm workers talking about? What have they been reading that has emerged as a common thread?

Prior to the July call, one board member recommended that we have a global theme this year with the justification that “our movement is local, but the issues we all face – health, food and community – are global and cross all borders.” Each board member had the opportunity to respond to this, as well as raise the other issues that are circling their farms, gardens and homes.

There was general support to have an international theme this year, and to focus on challenges and opportunities that are common to farmers across the country including labor, farm succession, trade policy and land tenure. They brainstormed workshops on international grassroots movements, migrant justice, and refugee resettlement, for example.

In addition, they discussed other issues which may not be the theme, but which should be addressed at the conference such as: 1) Income inequality – If we have reached the low-hanging fruit (15% of customers), how do we reach the 75% who can’t or don’t purchase organic food? How do consumer purchasing patterns influence farm scale? 2) Carbon farming – focus on how organic farmers are sequestering carbon and how that addresses other environmental concerns such as water and soil quality; and 3) Economic viability of small-scale agriculture and impacts of policies

such as the Food Safety Modernization Act on farm finances.

So, based on the overall support of an international theme, we are now approaching keynote and workshop speakers who can speak to that, previewing movies and brainstorming international menus for our meals. Of course, the conference will continue to have seemingly gazillion workshops that address all general homesteader/gardener/farmer/consumer issues, but an overarching theme will focus on how the Vermont organic movement is part of a global movement.

One disheartening part of the board call was the announcement that we are losing two of our board members. Sona Desai, a member of the leadership team (aka Governance Committee) of NOFA-VT let us all know that she is moving to San Diego (she left in August), and that Steve Paddock, Finance Committee Chair, was moving to Massachusetts. Both Sona and Steve had assumed important board leadership roles and will be missed! I want to publicly thank them both for their important contributions.

Our 2015 annual report featured a photo and quote from Sona (shown on the next page). Our annual report is available on our website, but if you would like a hard copy, please contact the office. We enjoy the opportunity annually to report on the breadth of our work, go through so many

fabulous photos and reflect on the year.

And, finally, thank you all to all of our members who invited friends and neighbors to join you at one of our pizza socials and workshops this summer – this is how we will grow our movement. With more fall workshops to come, and then the winter conference, of course, please keep it up!

*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.*



Heartbeat Lifesharing co-founder Hannah Schwartz.

ally. Heartbeat Lifesharing is one of 11 Camphill communities in the U.S.; there are over 100 worldwide. Camphill is an international movement of intentional communities designed to meet the needs of children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities through a combination of community life, the arts and work on the land. ([www.camphill.org](http://www.camphill.org))

All of the Camphill communities integrate some kind of land work as part of their day, and that is a critical component of Heartbeat’s mission as well. The farm at Heartbeat follows organic and biody-

amic practices, and balances providing a therapeutic and educational experience for the 18 friends with special needs who live there, and producing enough food to meet the needs of the 50 people who reside there. Whereas they currently produce 40% of the food

they consume (including dairy products, meat and vegetables), their goal is to meet 50-60% of their needs. Hannah explains that they are examining their scale of production. “If healing and revering the land is as critical as food production, what is the balance?” Along with providing a therapeutic setting for the friends, the farm incorporates interns – there are currently 11 for the year. “They come to learn about agriculture and social therapy,” says Hannah. “The pace where farm production is driving you is different,” explains Hannah, “here, everybody has

a part, working side by side in parallel functions.” Some of the modifications to the gardens to support an inclusive work environment include wider paths, and beds where plants are spaced wider apart.

The love of the land runs deep within Hannah. She was raised on a Camphill community and she explains that “working and eating from the land has always been a part of my life. When I wanted my children to have a relationship with food and where it comes from, I realized that being part of a community was the best way to make that happen.” She recognized that “having grown up in a community where life and work are woven, for me to be the kind of active parent I want to be, and to provide a unique opportunity for friends with special needs, this community is essential.”

I appreciate having been able to spend the day at Heartbeat and to follow up and interview Hannah for this article. She is the epitome of someone who lives her values. For more information on Heartbeat Lifesharing, visit [www.heartbeat.org](http://www.heartbeat.org).



## NOFA Vermont Thanks Outgoing Board Members

At a meeting last winter, board members chose quotes (lovingly designed for us by Bonnie Acker) to be pictured with. We wish the best of luck, and extend our gratitude, to outgoing board members Sona Desai and Steve Paddock. **Thank you!**



# Why I Choose Organic Everyday

Opinion by Rachel Fussell, Farmer Education Coordinator

There are many reasons why I choose to buy organic foods and products every day. For my small family of two (and our furry dog “child”), organic has always been a priority. I see organic as a no-brainer, it’s a direct vote for my immediate health, future generations, and the health of our environment.

As diabetes, heart disease, certain types of cancers, dementia, and other illnesses continue to rise in our country; more scientists are looking at our diets as the underlying cause of chronic inflammation which can exacerbate these diseases.

Eating products labeled as organic is not a silver bullet that will protect my family from every health concern, but I believe a diet rooted in organic food is a safer option. I also choose organic because I hope to continue pursuing my passion and love for the outdoors as I get older, which means I have less tolerance for toxic chemicals and drugs in my diet. I rely on USDA accredited

certification programs (like the Vermont Organic Farmers) to help guide my purchasing decisions, because the USDA or VOF label indicates that the product I’m buying has been produced through approved methods. Advertising by food corporations on products without a label haven’t been evaluated by a third party and can be misleading, which can make any food decision confusing. Every time I purchase an organic product I know that I’m avoiding GMOs, hormones, antibiotics, and drugs in animal products while also reducing pollution, protecting soil health, preserving farmland and biodiversity, and preserving our ecosystems. Because the organic standards are better for my health and wallet in the long-term, I don’t see the extra cost as being prohibitive

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*The bottom line is my health and well-being are my most valuable assets.*

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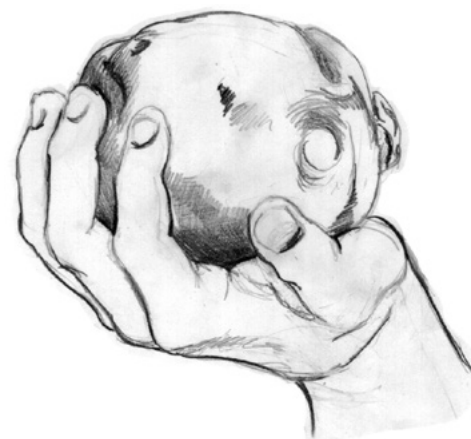
*“Humankind has been given an allotment of land. What we have is all we have.” Rachel Fussell, with Ellie.*

when I compare them to the value of my well-being. Eating organic will help save my family money and time in the long term by having fewer doctor visits and lower prescription costs. The bottom line is my health and well-being are my most valuable assets. You can find me trail running in the morning with my dog, mountain biking with my husband after work, backpacking with friends on the weekends, and snowboarding in the winter months.

All the things I enjoy would not be as enjoyable or even possible if my health declined. Therefore my approach to food is preventative and precautionary. When an activity (such as the simple act of shopping for my family) raises threats of harm to the environment or my health (such as buying industrial food products), I’d rather consume the safe option (in this case, organic), than expose myself to an unnecessary risk. My first line of defense is not a prescription, but a basket of organic vegetables and fruits from my local farmer and store. Along with all the things I’m trying to avoid, I am also protecting the things that are important

to me; my family’s health and the health of my environment. Each day I am voting with my dollars, and no matter what I buy, the food purchases I make impact our world.

Organic food for me is an investment in my health, my community, and my planet. Instead of going to the doctor, I’ll get my prescription from my local, organic farmers who are doing their part to heal the soil, purify the air, and keep my family healthy. ✨



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*We are seeking stories about why people choose organic foods. If you’d like to share your story, give us a shout at (802) 434-4122 or email [kim@nofavt.org](mailto:kim@nofavt.org)*

# Open Farm Week

One hundred farms and farmers markets around the state opened their barn doors and gates to visitors in the 2nd Vermont Open Farm Week from August 15th-21st. From workshops to tastings, farm tours, scavenger hunts and more, there were plenty of opportunities to get an in-depth look into Vermont's working landscape and meet many of the folks growing and producing our food! This event was organized by NOFA-VT in collaboration with City Market, Dig In Vermont, the Farm-Based Education Network, Shelburne



Farms, University of Vermont Extension, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing, the Vermont Farm to Plate Agritourism Task Force, Vermont Farm Tours, the Vermont Farmers Market Association, and the Vermont Fresh Network. NOFA-VT received support for this project from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service through grant 14-FMPPX-VT-0169.

# Interns are Amazing

We bid a fond farewell to our summer interns: Grace Butler, Chloe Kidder, Ariana Matthews-Salzman and Katie Cuthbert. We are so grateful for their thoughtful planning, boundless energy, tireless efforts, and incredible creativity. Ariana and Katie, the 2016 VT FEED/NOFA garden summer interns, are pictured below. They made eating local food and learning about nutrition fun and engaging for countless kids across Vermont this summer!



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# The Cure All: A Guide to Curing Vegetables for Winter Storage

*Originally published on the blog at HighMowingSeeds.com. Used with permission.*

As gardening grows in popularity, people are figuring out all sorts of clever ways to get their homegrown vegetables to keep through the winter. Now that root cellars have become a rarity, many companies offer a range of storage tools and other items that can help. But creating the perfect storage environment for a particular crop is only half the battle—they have to be cured properly too, if they're going to store for any length of time. Here are our curing tips for the crops that need it.

## Onions

Onions for storage have a unique signal to show that they're ready to harvest: their tops will start to dry out and flop over. Some varieties, like Cabernet F1, will continue growing after this happens. But for most varieties, the necks are crimped when the tops fall, preventing further photosynthesis and growth. These onions should be pulled up for curing.

Onions can be cured in a number of different ways, but regardless of the method you choose, the principle is the same: they need 1-2 weeks of dry, warm conditions for the necks to dry down and the skins to become papery. You can use this test to see if your onions have finished curing: cut the top off a large onion about 1" from the bulb. If you see any green, they need more time. If the neck is completely dry with no green, your onions are fully cured.

Here are several techniques you can use for curing onions in different environments:

- If the weather is dry and there is no threat of frost, simply pull onions and lay them down in the field to "sun-cure" for 3-5 days.
- In a warm greenhouse or hoophouse,

ideally with a daytime temperature around 80-90°F and humidity around 80%, lay onions out in a single layer on wire racks for two weeks. Check them every few days and cull any bulbs that have spoiled.

- Onions can also be cured in a single layer on a clean surface in a shed, barn, loft, attic, garage, sunroom or under a covered porch as long as there is good ventilation and no risk of frost for at least 2 weeks.

Once your onions are cured, clip the tops 1" from the bulbs and store in baskets or crates (to ensure good air circulation) in an area that is consistently 35-40°F and 65-75% humidity.

## Potatoes

Potatoes need curing too, though many people don't realize it. Fortunately curing them is really easy. Once the potato foliage has turned brown and died back, leave the tubers in the ground for another two weeks to allow their skins to "set". This is when the skin thickens and forms a strong protective barrier that prevents the tubers from spoiling.

After the two weeks are up, harvest the potatoes and gently brush the soil off. Now it's time to cure them for a week to 10 days in a dark, well-ventilated area with high humidity. Simply put them in open paper bags, crates or cardboard boxes in a cool, dark place such as a garage or basement so that their skins can thoroughly dry. When the curing period is up, cull any green, injured or diseased tubers before

storing for the winter in a dark, humid environment around 40-45°F.

## Winter Squash

Winter Squash should be harvested before a heavy frost, usually when most foliage has died back, the stem is becoming dry and brown, and you cannot easily indent the skin with a fingernail. They can generally handle one or two light frosts, but it's best to cover them or bring them in when cold temperatures are predicted, since multiple nights below 50°F can reduce their storage life. Always leave at least 1" of stem attached to each squash, since short, broken or missing stems (as well as injured fruits) mean reduced storage life.

Much like onions, winter squash can be stored in several ways, but they generally need about one week of warm, dry conditions with good ventilation for their skins to dry and harden. The sole exception is acorn squash, which should be immediately put in cold storage after



(Winter Storage, continued from previous page)

harvest. Try any of the following environments for curing everything from butternuts to pumpkins:

- If the weather is dry, leave fruits in the sun for 5-7 days, covering in the evening if frost is predicted (a coldframe on pallets is excellent for this purpose).
- Fruits can be cured in a greenhouse at 80-90°F with good ventilation for 3-5 days.
- Alternatively, a warm, sunny place such as a sunroom, south facing window or loft inside the house is also suitable.

Store cured squashes in a cool place around 50-60°F with good ventilation (entryways, mudrooms, basements and bulkheads can often provide the cooler temperatures preferred by winter squashes.)

### Other crops

Other crops can store well too, but don't require any curing. These crops include dry beans, beets, carrots, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, radicchio, kohlrabi, leeks, melons and watermelons, radishes and turnips. And certain cold-hardy crops such as Brussels sprouts, cabbage and leeks will actually improve in flavor and sweetness after a light frost or two. ✨

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# More Vermont Dairy Farmers Consider Transitioning to Organic

By Sarah Flack

Dairy farmers shipping milk to non organic milk buyers have been struggling with low pay prices for quite a while now. At the same time, the organic pay price, which doesn't suffer the same cyclical rises and falls as conventional milk, has gone up, so a larger than usual number of VT dairy farms are researching, planning, or have already started their transition. Organic grain is more expensive than conventional grain; however, many farms find that even with higher feed costs, the benefit of a more stable pay price makes it easier to have a long term financial plan.

Certification doesn't assure that an organic milk buyer will pick up the milk, so dairy farms need to get a signed contract with a buyer before they start their transition. The number of companies buying organic milk from dairy farms in VT has increased in the last couple of years from just two companies to five. But organic milk buyers only sign new farms when they need more organic milk, and when the farm is in the right location (for the trucking routes). So sometimes a farm has to wait a while to get a contract so they can start their transition. This can be a stressful wait for a dairy farm struggling financially due to low milk prices, but it helps prevent an oversupply of organic milk, which helps keep the pay price farmers receive more stable.

Transitioning the land, and the dairy herd, is costly, which is why most organic milk buyers also pay transition incentives to help farms make it through the final herd transition year. But those payments



don't cover all the expenses of transition, so most farms also need a transition loan. The transition to organic for a dairy farm not only involves the cost of buying organic feed for a year, (while being paid a low conventional milk price!), it may also involve other expenses. Farms that have been growing non organic annual crops such as corn will need to plan and pay for field transitions including organic seeds and fertilizers. The farm may also need to design and build a new grazing system for the milking herd and young stock to meet organic pasture requirements. Some farms find that the farm will do better with a smaller herd once they are organic, so the herd is downsized prior to the transition year. In addition, since the organic standards require all cattle over 6 months to be able to go outdoors every day in the winter, the farm may have to build new barnyards or even new housing.

NOFA farm advisors have been busy in the last year visiting farms interested in transition to help them decide if their

farm is a good candidate for organic dairy, doing cash flow projections to determine transition costs, writing business plans to secure loans, connecting with milk buyers to get a contract, and learning how to navigate the required paperwork. It is an honor to get to work with these hard working dairy farmers, and exciting to be part of the process of increasing the number of acres of organically managed land in our beautiful state.

Organic certification isn't going to be the right decision for every farm. The ease with which a dairy farm can be transitioned to organic varies depending on the details of a farm—the herd, feed sources and land base. For farms thinking about transition, it pays to ask the right questions ahead of time, learn the facts, come up with a plan, and know the costs before starting. While the transition and certification process isn't easy, farmers who have successfully made it through say it was worth it to have a more stable pay price, making financial planning easier. ✨

**Sarah Flack** is a consultant specializing in grass-based and organic livestock production. She is the author of *The Art and Science of Grazing and Organic Dairy Production*. She provides technical assistance to farms interested in transitioning to organic in Vermont through the NOFA VT Technical Assistance Program.



# Local Squash & Caramelized Onion Rustic Tart

## Ingredients

- 3 large onions, thinly sliced
- 2 cups diced winter squash
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 cup grated Alpine-style cheese (e.g. Tarentaise)
- 1 sheet rolled pie pastry (frozen or homemade)
- Olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper, to taste

## Directions

Preheat oven to 400°F. In a large skillet with a lid over very low heat, add about 3 Tbsp of olive oil, the onions and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. Mix, cover, and let cook for about 30-40 minutes, stirring about every 10 minutes until golden brown and very soft. Set aside and let cool.

Meanwhile, toss the cubed squash in a large bowl with olive oil, salt and pepper until evenly coated. Spread on a baking sheet and roast for 20 minutes or until golden brown and tender. Lower oven temperature to 375° F.

On a separate baking sheet lined with parchment paper, lay your pie crust out flat. Trim the edges so it is a rough circle shape. Leaving about 3 inches from the edge around the circumference, pile the onions and then the squash. Sprinkle the top with the thyme and the grated cheese. Fold the edges of the crust in,, overlapping, leaving the center of the tart open.

Bake the tart for about 45-55 minutes or until the crust is golden brown. Remove from the oven and serve hot!



This recipe courtesy of Erin McGuire, VOF Certification Program Assistant

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Golden Russet Farm, Shoreham

photo by J. Silverman

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# Fall Policy Update

By Maddie Monty, NOFA Vermont Policy Advisor

## Organic Hydroponics Task Force Report Released

To certify or not to certify? That is the question the National Organic Program's (NOP) Hydroponics and Aquaponics Task Force has been debating over the past year. The 16-member panel, convened by NOP in September 2015, was brought together to report to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) on current hydroponic and aquaponic production methods. At the heart of the group's assignment was the question of whether hydroponic and aquaponic production methods should qualify for USDA organic certification.

Hydroponic operations rely on nutrient solutions and inert growing mediums rather than soil to produce vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, lettuce and basil. Aquaponics combines aquaculture and hydroponics, using soilless mediums and fish waste for nutrients. Despite NOSB recommending otherwise in 2010, NOP currently does allow hydroponic operations to be certified as organic. As hydroponic operations grow in popularity and scale, soil-based organic farmers maintain that soil is the foundation of organic production and should be required for organic certification.

The task force, appointed by USDA, was made up of both hydroponic and soil-based farmers, including Vermont farmer David Chapman, as well as several former NOSB members. Its report, released in July, reflects members' divergent views and essentially offers two opposing conclusions. The report will be presented to the NOSB at its fall meeting in St. Louis, and will be used to guide the NOSB in making an updated recommendation to the National Organic Program.

## Fall NOSB Meeting & Comment Period

Twice each year, NOSB meetings provide an opportunity for organic farmers and stakeholders to weigh in on organic production methods and inputs. This year's

fall meeting of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) will take place in St. Louis, Missouri from November 16 – 18. The meeting agenda is now available on the NOSB webpage, and written comments will be accepted through October 26 at Regulations.gov. You can also sign up on the NOSB website (before October 26) to give oral comments via webinar on Thursday, November 3rd between 1:00 and 4:00pm.

Major topics to be reviewed and discussed include:

- Sunset 2018 Sunset Materials
- Hydroponics
- Biodegradable Biobased Mulch
- Strengthening Organic Seed Guidance
- Excluded Methods Terminology
- Removal of Ivermectin from the National List (parasiticide for live-stock)
- Packaging Substances used in food (e.g. BPA)
- 2017 Research Priorities

Let us know which materials, inputs, or methods you care about. Contact Nicole Dehne, VOF Certification Director at [nicole@nofavt.org](mailto:nicole@nofavt.org).

## The Fed's Famous GMO Fables

On July 29th, less than one month after Vermont's hard-fought mandatory GE labeling law took effect, President Obama quietly signed S. 764, a bill passed by Congress that preempts Vermont's labeling law and sets a far weaker national labeling standard for GE foods. The National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Law, as it's formally titled, was just the latest in a string of industrial food and agrichemical interests to stop Act 120 in its tracks. Unfortunately, this time they succeeded. Now, the broader labeling movement



is taking a hard look at its options and considering where to go from here.

What exactly does this new “disclosure law” accomplish?

- It allows food manufacturers to bury information about GE ingredients behind a USDA-developed symbol or a QR code (scannable only for those with access to a smart phone and reliable Internet service).
- It explicitly allows organic foods to be labeled non-GE – an almost meaningless concession for the organic industry since GMOs are not permitted in organic production.
- Through clever use of the term “bioengineering,” it narrowly redefines genetic engineering in a way that may exclude many common GE techniques.
- It preempts not only Vermont's mandatory GE food labeling law, but also our GE seed labeling law, which has been in effect since 2004 and is a critical tool for farmers and for tracking the presence of GE crops in Vermont.
- It establishes no enforcement mechanism or penalty for companies that do not comply, making the law essentially voluntary.

You may notice a glaring hole in this list of accomplishments: labeling genetically engineered foods. By allowing the use of QR codes or symbols, the federal law does not provide clear on-package labeling and discriminates against those without a smart phone or access to reliable Internet

service. What's worse, it may exclude some of the most common GE ingredients from requiring a label.

### What's next?

The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has been charged with developing a national disclosure standard under the law. The Department established a working group shortly after the law's enactment, and says it is developing a timeline for rulemaking.

As for the broad coalition of food, farming and consumer groups who have spent years advocating for a meaningful mandatory labeling standard, it's safe to say this isn't the end of the road. Some national groups have said they plan to file suit to overturn the federal law. Others plan to engage with USDA through the rulemaking process to push for the strongest and most enforceable labeling standard possible. Still others have already started putting pressure on companies who had put GMO labels on packages

from Vermont to California to continue to do so.

While the end of the latest chapter is disappointing to say the least, it might just provide a much needed opportunity for us all to look up from the long slog of the labeling battle to see what lies ahead. There are so many roads the

labeling community could choose to walk down from here, like pushing for stricter regulation of pesticides that harm pollinators and pollute our soils and water, or ramping up pressure on USDA to finally do something about GMO contamination of organic farms. I for one am hopeful that we might. ✨

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# The Best Berries for our Region

Rachel Fussell, Education Coordinator, NOFA Vermont



As part of NOFA-VT's On-Farm Workshop Series this summer, a group of farmers and gardeners met to discuss blueberry varieties as part of an afternoon workshop. The workshop was hosted at Adam's Berry Farm, an organic berry farm growing blueberries, raspberries and strawberries for market and through their farmstand.

Adam Hausmann, owner of the farm, discussed what characteristics he looks for when choosing varieties for his farm. He laid out the most important considerations to think about before buying or planting a blueberry plant for your farm or home.

1. Find both a cold and heat tolerant variety for Vermont's cold winters and hot summers. Look for hardiness zones when searching for varieties
2. Disease resistance for organic growers. Do your research to see which varieties offer increased disease resistance before planting.
3. Flavor is huge! Shop around and taste different varieties around the state. Find a variety whose flavor and taste excites you.
4. Yields. To some people who have a small home garden or homestead, yield may not be the most important factor, but it's always good to understand what to expect for quantity of berries come harvest time.
5. Time of ripening. Each variety has a specific time of ripening during the season: early, mid or late. Look at the timeframe and rhythm of your farm and life to understand how the berries will best fit. And if you are planting berries for production, look at market gaps as a signal for which

variety to choose.

6. Labor needs. Even if you are only planting one bush, labor and time should always be a factor you consider. The biggest chunk of time will be during the harvest season, and less in maintenance for pruning and soil care.
7. Pest pressure. Pest pressure is site specific, however some pests like the Spotted Wing Drosophila, will come on to almost all farms in the fall. This makes fall/late bearing raspberries and blueberries difficult to harvest.
8. Berry size. Some people like bigger varieties because it means less labor versus more time harvesting smaller berries.
9. Know your site and soils. Blueberries won't like heavier soils (clay), and alkaline soils. Therefore you should get your soils tested before you plant, and think about where on your farm or property the plant would be most likely to succeed.

Given these considerations and his specific site, Adam shared his top 5 blueberry varieties for his farm: Blue Ray, Blue Gold, Patriot, Spartan, and Nelson. Each of these varieties are suitable to Vermont's climate, and scored well on flavor, yields and disease resistance. Research your needs for incorporating berries into your life and land using these useful tips.

Come and learn about other production and crop techniques at NOFA-VT's On-Farm Workshop Series, happening until the end of September. Learn about elderberry production, growing brassicas in the fall, and enjoy a slice of pizza at pizza social. For more information, go to [www.nofavt.org/onfarmworkshops](http://www.nofavt.org/onfarmworkshops). ✨



# Ask Callie



## Dear Callie,

*Recently I went to the grocery store and saw some cereal labeled as “Certified Transitional”. I was stumped. What does this new label mean and why does it exist at all?*

*Sincerely,  
Label Conscious Lou*

## Dear Lou,

Did you know that fewer than 1% of the farmers in the U.S. are organic? One of the reasons for this is because it takes 3 years to transition land to organic production. This means that farmers who are switching over to organic have to spend years managing their crops organically, while still receiving a conventional price for their crops. Obviously this is a strong disincentive for conventional producers who are considering organic production.

Also interesting is that the demand for organic products outpaces domestic supply and it is often imports of organic product from other countries that fill this gap. All of this leads to the idea and motivation behind the “certified transitional” label.

This label is used by growers that are in the process of transitioning to organic production. At the moment there are no agreed upon standards used by all certification agencies that define “transitional” but this idea is under discussion. In May of 2016, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) requested that the USDA develop a national certification program, through the Quality System Assessment Program, for transitioning organic farms. This would pave the way for one set of standards that define transitional.

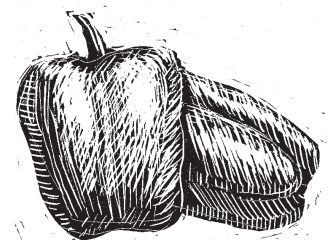
The history of this label has its roots in the National Organic Standards Board. Back in 2002 the NOSB passed a recommen-

ation regarding which products could be labeled transitional. This original recommendation required that products must be managed organically for a minimum of one year in order to qualify for the term transitional.

Proponents of the certified transitional label feel that developing a label and a market for transitional product will help incentivize producers to transition to organic. Opponents are worried that the transitional label could detract from the organic label in the marketplace. Both sides seem to recognize that there are issues that would need to be worked out in order to have a successful program. This includes preventing producers from rotating in and out of a transitional label without ever achieving organic certification.

Other questions that have come up concerning this new label include whether imported products can be represented as “certified transitional”. If the focus of the label is to increase domestic supply, allowing imported products to bear the label could be problematic. And unlike the organic standards, the USDA Quality System Assessment Program does not require any public process as part of the USDA approval process.

In the meantime, keep an eye out for the “certified transitional” label in the marketplace, as private industry is moving ahead in the absence of national regulations and national regulations may not be very far off. In May, OTA submitted final standards for a transitional label to the USDA, which plans to roll out a program later this year. ✨





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# Farm Fresh Food for All – During the Summer!

By Amy Gifford, NOFA Vermont School Food Program Coordinator

“School’s out for the summer!” is a phrase many students pine to hear. However, for the 37,000 Vermont students who receive free or reduced meals through the National School Lunch Program these words are most unwelcome. All too often for these kids, the end of the school year signals the end of their access to at least one reliable and healthy meal a day. In fact, even though there are more than 290 summer meal sites across Vermont (according to preliminary data from the Vermont Agency of Education), only about 8,000 kids access lunch through the Summer Food Service Program. This summer, with funding from the Vermont Community Foundation, NOFA-VT took some steps to address a couple of the factors that may be contributing to this disparity.

Chicken or Tofu Sesame Noodles loaded with local zucchini, yellow squash, cilantro, scallions, and kale served alongside fresh local sugar snap peas and strawberries. This might not be what you’d expect from a free meal through the federal Summer Food Service Program but when NOFA-VT teamed up with Hunger Free Vermont, non-profit community organizations, and two food service director power houses, that’s exactly what kids visiting the July farmers’ markets in Winooski and St. Johnsbury got.

Up to now, Vermont’s summer meal sites have operated only on weekdays. To increase accessibility, NOFA-VT looked to these farmers’ markets as promising places to serve weekend meals. The willingness of the market managers to partner with us, combined with NOFA-VT’s efforts to attract families to markets that accept EBT and offer Crop Cash, paved

the way for a fruitful relationship. On four consecutive Saturdays and Sundays in July, NOFA-VT staff collaborated with the St. Johnsbury and Winooski Farmers’ Markets, respectively, to serve free lunches. Because these two communities meet the Community Eligibility Provision requirements established through the **Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010**, every child under the age of 18 can receive a free meal at these sites.

On top of feeding hungry Vermont youth, as a partner in Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day), NOFA-VT recognized the opportunity that summer meals sites offer for extending farm to school to 12 months of the year. To that end, NOFA-VT provided local purchasing support to the food service programs preparing the meals to help them increase the amount of local ingredients being served. At both sites nutrition education activities were paired with the local food being served, with the goal of helping kids develop a connection to healthy food while learning about local agriculture. After just one week in Winooski NOFA-VT received the following feedback:

*“Yesterday my three kids (aged 9, 3 and 3) ate the free meals being given out at the Winooski Farmers Market. They enjoyed each of the foods and I was surprised how well they took to the noodles which included a large variety of vegetables that they probably would not have eaten if served individually. I also was appreciative of how many local seasonal products were featured.*”

*“I love that there was no registration needed, no paperwork, and no proof of income or address required making the program very accessible to all without any judgement or stigma attached. Thank you for providing a delicious, inclusive lunch*

*to us and to other kids at the market. I appreciate your commitment to bringing food to children and supporting our local farm economy.”*



NOFA-VT also provided support to 8 weekday summer meals sites across the state, helping to increase the amount of local ingredients on the menu and provide nutrition education. With the assistance of on-site staff and our fabulous interns (see page 5), for four consecutive weeks kids participating in summer programs at these sites planted, harvested, observed, taste-tested, and prepared the same foods being served in the programs’ summer meals. We are currently evaluating the impact of this ground-breaking work and plan to seek additional funding to expand the program next summer.

Our sights are set on working with additional farmers’ markets and more weekday summer meals sites, establishing a sustainable model that can be implemented statewide.

Read the shout-out we were given by USDA on their blog here:

<http://goo.gl/7H9c1v> 

# Photos from the 2nd Annual Farmer Olympics

Farm teams from all across Vermont gathered together on a beautiful afternoon in August at the Broad Acres Farm in Vershire, Vermont, to vie against one another in a brutal competition of guts and glory. Pregame warmups included the Hay Bale Toss and Guess the Number of Cows in the Field. The Opening Ceremony featured the Olympic anthem played on

kazoos, and a makeshift torch was set ablaze. Events included “The Manure Relay,” “Wrapped Bale Push,” and “Seeding Relay” and even a set of “farm math” problems. The games were generously supported by West Lebanon Feed & Supply, Frazer Insurance Group, Vermont Farm Bureau, and The Skinny Pancake: Upper Valley Creperie.

*Left: NOFA staff members (l. to r.) Mike Good, Nicole Dehne, Enid Wonnacott, Rachel Fussell, and Maddie Monty play the opening Olympic anthem...on kazoos.*



*2nd row, left: Vermont organic farmer Bruce Hennessey of Maple Wind Farm kicks off the games with a song.*



*2nd row middle: Farm host Niko Horster of Shire Beef held the torch in the opening ceremony.*



*2nd row, right: Sam Fuller and Rachel Fussell of NOFA-VT, stand by as the games begin.*



*Bottom: Teams compete in the round bale hay rolling race.*



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NOFA welcomes the following members who recently joined us, as well as the following businesses for their ongoing support. Thank you for supporting Vermont organic agriculture!

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- Dona Brown, Underhill, VT
- Jane & Tracy Brown, Burlington, VT
- Annalise Carington, Middlebury, VT
- Katrin Consler, Shoreham, VT
- Marguerite Dunn, Norwich, VT
- Roger Dutton, Foster Brothers Farm, Middlebury, VT
- Benjamin Hodgdon & Margarita Fernandez, Richmond, VT
- Linda Guzynski, Durham, NC
- Mona Hall, Poultney, VT
- Deborah Healey, W Ferrisburgh, VT
- Arthur Hynes, Hinesburg, VT
- Chrisman Kearn, Jamaica, VT
- Suzanne Lacey, Barnard, VT
- Kyle Leibold, Leibold Farm, Plainfield, VT
- Jeanne MacIntyre, Bondville, VT
- Peter & Isabella Martin, Jericho, VT
- Heath McAllister, Clark's House of Flowers, Swanton, VT
- Eleanor Mesler, Milton, VT
- Hannah Morris, Montpelier, VT
- Bronwyn Murre, Brattleboro, VT
- Roger Myers, Shelburne, VT
- Jeff Ramsey, S Burlington, VT
- Sarah Robear, S Burlington, VT
- Christine Staffa, Wiseacres Farm, Underhill, VT
- Patrick Sullivan, Roots & Shoots Community Farm, Montpelier, VT
- Bob & Susan Titterton, Morrisville, VT
- Jack & Alexa Visco, Burlington, VT
- Resty Weagle, Spencer, MA
- Jasmine Yuris, Johnson, VT

## New & Renewing Business Members

- Samuel Carruth, SQM Organic, Atlanta, GA
- Charlie Russell & Joanne Chickering, Resource Management Inc., Holderness, NH
- Chuck Conway, O Bread, Shelburne, VT
- Cheryl & JD DeVos, Kimball Brook Farm, Hinesburg, VT
- Peter & Isabella Gile, Two Bad Cats, LLC, N Clarendon, VT
- Karen Kennedy MacIsaac, Highland Sugarworks, Websterville, VT
- Tom & Catherine Kenyon, Nitty Gritty Grain Co. of Vermont, Charlotte, VT
- Meghann Nelson, Green Mountain Inn, Stowe, VT
- Larry Plesent, Vermont Soap, Middlebury, VT
- Laurie Ristino, VLS Center for Ag & Food Systems, S Royalton, VT
- David Ritchie, Green Mountain Spinnery, Putney, VT
- Meg Lucas & Barbi Schreiber, Vermont's Local Banquet Magazine, Saxtons River, VT
- Tom Spohn, WhiteWave Foods, Broomfield, CO
- Peter & Virginia Vogel, Back Roads Food Co., Brattleboro, VT
- Dan Walters, Gringo Jack's, Manchester, VT
- Vermont Compost Company, Montpelier, VT
- Five Corners Farmers Market, Essex Junction, VT
- Grower's Discount Labels, Tunnel, NY
- Laraway Youth & Family Services, Johnson, VT
- Rutland Area Food Co-op, Rutland, VT

## Thank you to our recent supporters:

### In-kind support for the 2016 Farmer Olympics:

- King Arthur Flour, dough for pizza oven
- Shire Beef, burger patties
- Skinny Pancake, Hanover, NH, sweet and savory crepes
- West Lebanon Feed & Supply, five \$25 gift certificates

### Financial Support for the 2016 Farmer Olympics:

- Vermont Farm Bureau, \$250 to sponsor the 2016 Farmer Olympics
- Frazer Insurance Company, \$200 to sponsor the 2016 Farmer Olympics

### Other support:

- April Cornell – donation of 4 table cloths for NOFA display tables
- First Step Print Shop – printing of Share the Harvest promotion materials
- Main Street Landing, \$500 corporate contribution
- The Stella Dehne Charitable Gift Fund, \$500 to support the work of NOFA-VT
- Vermont Land Trust, \$100 to sponsor the Pollinator On-Farm Workshop
- Yankee Farm Credit, \$1,000 to support the Organic Dairy Economic Study
- Barrie Silver, \$20 Vermont Gives Fundraiser
- Julia Geer, \$500 Vermont Gives Fundraiser

### Program Grants:

- The Forrest & Frances Lattner Foundation, \$25,000 for program support
- Vermont Community Foundation, Nonprofit Capacity Building Grants Program, \$2,500 for donor cultivation to enhance financial sustainability




Friends & members gathered in July to enjoy a pizza social at Sweetland Farm in Norwich, VT

- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, \$1,000 for Farmers Market Promotion
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, \$27,222 Working Lands Grant: VT Organic Dairy: Strengthening and Growing the Industry
- The John Merck Fund, \$70,000 to build momentum for institutional local and regional food purchasing in Vermont and around New England
- Dr. Bronner's/ Organic Consumers Fund, \$4,093.38 to support GMO policy work in collaboration with Vermont Public Interest Research Group
- Farm Aid, \$1,450 to support policy work in collaboration with the NOFA Interstate Council

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— Peter Burmeister & Katherine Fanelli  
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- Golden Well Farm and Apiary, New Haven
- Henpecker Ridge Maples, Enosburg Falls
- J & L Dairy, Troy
- John Cushman Maple, Waterville
- Moose Valley Mapleworks, LLC, Lowell
- Ox Pasture Maples, E Berkshire
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