

# NOFA Notes



Quarterly newsletter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Summer 2024



A Big Win for Local Food Access | Meet New Traditions Farm | Vermont Organic Milk  
in Vermont Schools | Food Hubs Achieve Organic Certification, Together

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Left to right, top to bottom: Em Virzi from Union Brook Farm brings her perspective to Small Farm Action Day at the statehouse, co-hosted by NOFA-VT and Rural Vermont; NOFA-VT staff Maddie Kempner and Johanna Doren advocate for public investment in local food access programs (see page 6 for more); Julie Rubaud (left) explains the role of beneficial insects in the greenhouses at Red Wagon Plants in Hinesburg; Freshly washed spinach at Singer Cedars Farmstead in Orwell; NOFA-VT staff picketing outside Hannaford during a boycott with Migrant Justice to support their Milk With Dignity program.

Cover photo: Pizza social at Understory Farm, taken by New England Food and Farm.



Dear friend of NOFA-VT,

I was recently catching up with a friend and mentor, Andy. Andy is a longtime NOFA-VT member who is currently working to help the Plainfield Co-op land a new home—increasing local food access, ensuring a solid market for local products, supporting thriving rural communities, and investing in community ownership as an important alternative to mega-corporate growth and consolidation. Inspired by Andy’s long-time change-making efforts and his seemingly unlimited capacity to do good, I expressed to Andy a bit of overwhelm at the state of the globe. Andy reminded me that when global-scale politics feel out of our individual scope to change, we can “go down a level.” If the national level still feels too big, we can look at the state level, or smaller still, to the scale of town, road, or even that of next-door neighbors and backyards. Somewhere, at some scale, we will each recognize a place where we can roll up our sleeves and get involved in making change.



Especially in times of extreme fraction and division, we must remember that we are not responsible for fixing everything alone, but rather are part of an ecosystem. We struggle, or we thrive, together. If we can each find our niche, and celebrate the unique and different levels at which we all have the ability to work, we can make so much more happen than we ever could alone. Think about all the collaborators it requires to harvest just one fruit: millions of soil microbes create healthy soil that can hold the water and minerals needed to nourish roots; a ruminant who at some point fertilized the soil; a plant community of low ground cover that provides the right shade and climate for small insects; pollinators who busy themselves from flower to flower; the tree itself offering up blossoms at just the right moment; the farmworker rubbing out other blossoms to ensure each has enough space, another still to pluck it at the right moment and carry the fruit to market. Together, a full ecosystem must collaborate for one delicious harvest. The tree can’t make fruit alone.

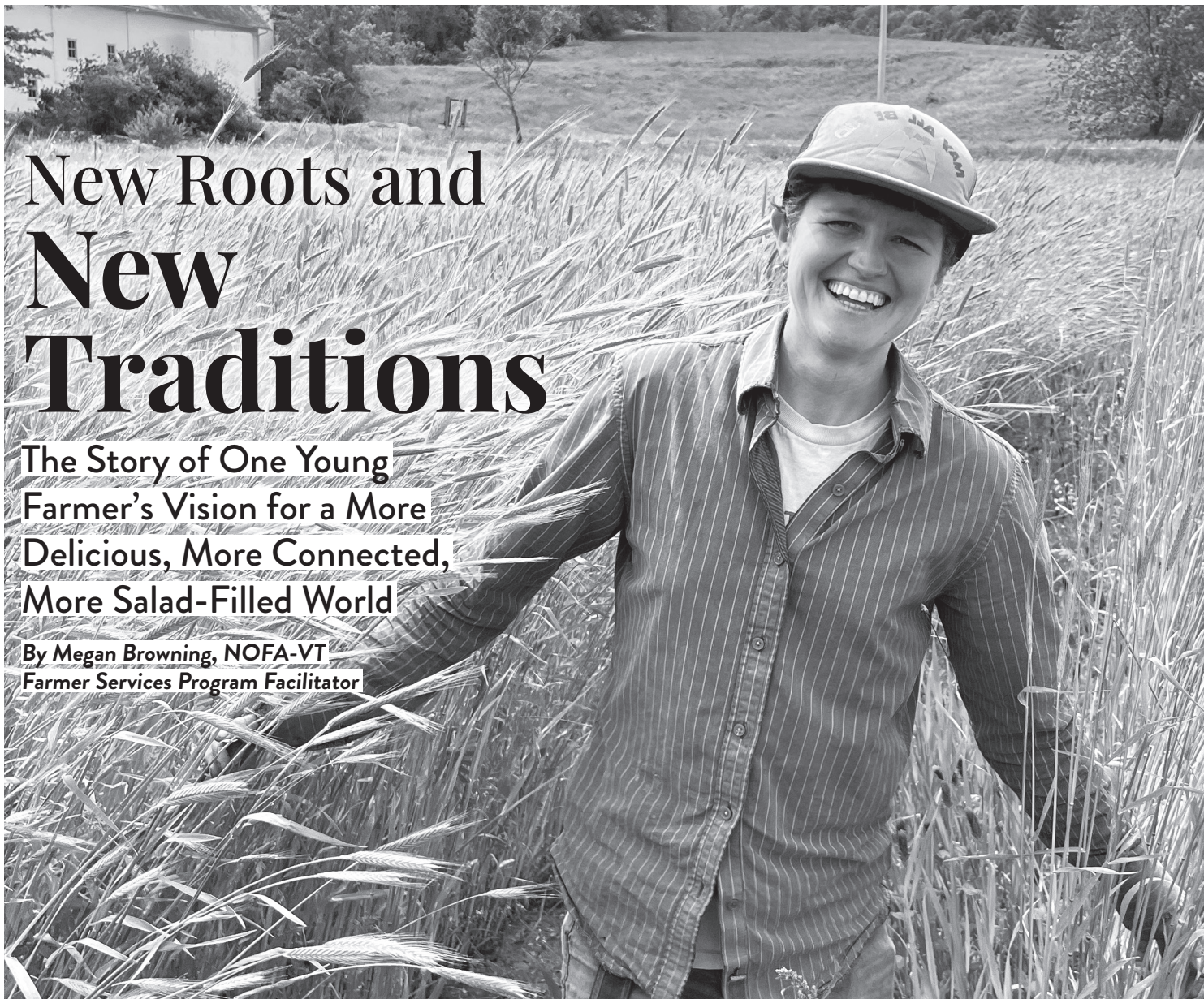
Working locally does not mean we ignore the global. Instead, we take our real agency seriously, shifting from helpless readers of the news to cultivators of possibility as we ask: what is my role? What step can I take today—within my context and community—to nourish the world we need?

What I love most about the people who make up NOFA-VT is they are people who are already planting the world we need. We are a people’s organization, which means that we are led by and for our membership. NOFA-VT was started over a half-century ago, by farmers for farmers who knew that growing food in a way that healed the planet while nourishing people was possible—indeed, it has been the norm for generations. These people with their (b)old idea organized themselves by conducting meetings and potlucks, barn dances and field walks, building relationships and sharing tools, and ultimately advocating together in their towns and state and, eventually, globally. They started organizing among themselves to nourish the world they knew was possible and the steps they took locally, right here in these fields, rippled out. We’re doing this still; together, adapting, learning, and changing, and hopefully still moving together as a team for healing and possibility, of nourishment for both our land and our communities.

In “right-level” change-making news: NOFA-VT’s members, some of them farmers and some limited-income Vermonters, advocated during the recent legislative session for public investment in food access and farmer support through two of NOFA-VT’s longstanding food access programs: Crop Cash and Farm Share. These are win-win double-benefit programs, paying farmers a market rate for their food while also putting dollars in the pockets of limited-income Vermonters to make sure they can access the food grown by their neighbors. These powerful leaders, regular people with good ideas, spoke their truth and together helped ensure that these programs got funded (for the first time ever as part of the state’s budget!) with a \$300,000 state allocation. This money will help keep our state more food secure while also building soil, protecting biodiversity, cleaning water, and preserving our working landscape. Yes to public funds going towards public good! Yes to supporting farmers and food-insecure folks at the same time! Yes to collaboration towards the solutions we already know are possible! As we experience the power that we have to make positive change when we come together, we can dream bigger.

What will we do next together?

Grace Oedel  
Executive Director, NOFA-VT



# New Roots and New Traditions

The Story of One Young Farmer's Vision for a More Delicious, More Connected, More Salad-Filled World

By Megan Browning, NOFA-VT Farmer Services Program Facilitator

"Welcome to Salad Paradise" reads the homepage of New Tradition Farm, owned, operated, and stewarded by Stoni Tomson. "I became a farmer because I love eating, feeding people, and basking in the glory of our Earth. New Tradition Farm is an expression of that love. It's also a way to turn dreams for a better world into flavorful action right here in Huntington, VT!" Stoni writes. "Let's eat our way to a better world and create some new traditions together."

Stoni Tomson, a graduate of NOFA-VT's Farm Beginnings program and current participant in our Journey Farmer program, brings immense passion and a deep work ethic to their stewardship of the land and ecosystems, and their production of delicious vegetables. Stoni grows salad vegetables for a CSA, two farmers markets, and the Williston Food Shelf, and recently added a sizeable perennial planting of plums, pears, peaches, cherries, hazelnuts, chestnuts, walnuts, American persimmons paw paws, blueberries, raspberries, gomi berries, and more. Now, in addition to quick salad crops that may be in and out of the field in 40-60 days, Stoni half-jokes that they are setting up for the long haul by stewarding crops that will hopefully stick around for the next 500 years.

Despite the farm's focus on salad vegetables, Stoni shared on a recent farm tour that cover crops are their favorite crop of all, an illustration of Stoni's dedication to soil health. "They are so hopeful!"

Stoni said, with a happy grin. Stoni also uses deep compost, plantings to attract beneficial insects, living pathways, and a variety of other practices to build organic matter and prioritize the health of the soil. New Tradition Farm is in its fourth season, but its first season in its current location, and Stoni is in the process of getting to know the land and working to build the soil's organic matter. This is work that Stoni takes great pride in as a farmer.

"Dear Salad Lover, I love to eat," writes Stoni, "One of my earliest memories is of my aunt spoon-feeding me and exclaiming, 'Such a good eater!' Beyond that, I know good food is sacred. As I grew up, though, I became aware of the ugly injustices of the industrial food system. I saw that I could join the movement of small-scale organic farmers and conscious eaters who are creating a delicious alternative. After working on a diverse array of small organic farms around the country since 2016, I am so grateful to be kicking off my 4th season as New Tradition Farm."

When asked about their greatest challenges, Stoni shared land access at the top of the list. Stoni went through an incredibly challenging shift to find a home for New Tradition Farm as they navigated losing the leased land where the farm began and starting anew in its current location at Jubilee Farm in Huntington. This shift had both physical and emotional implications. However, the

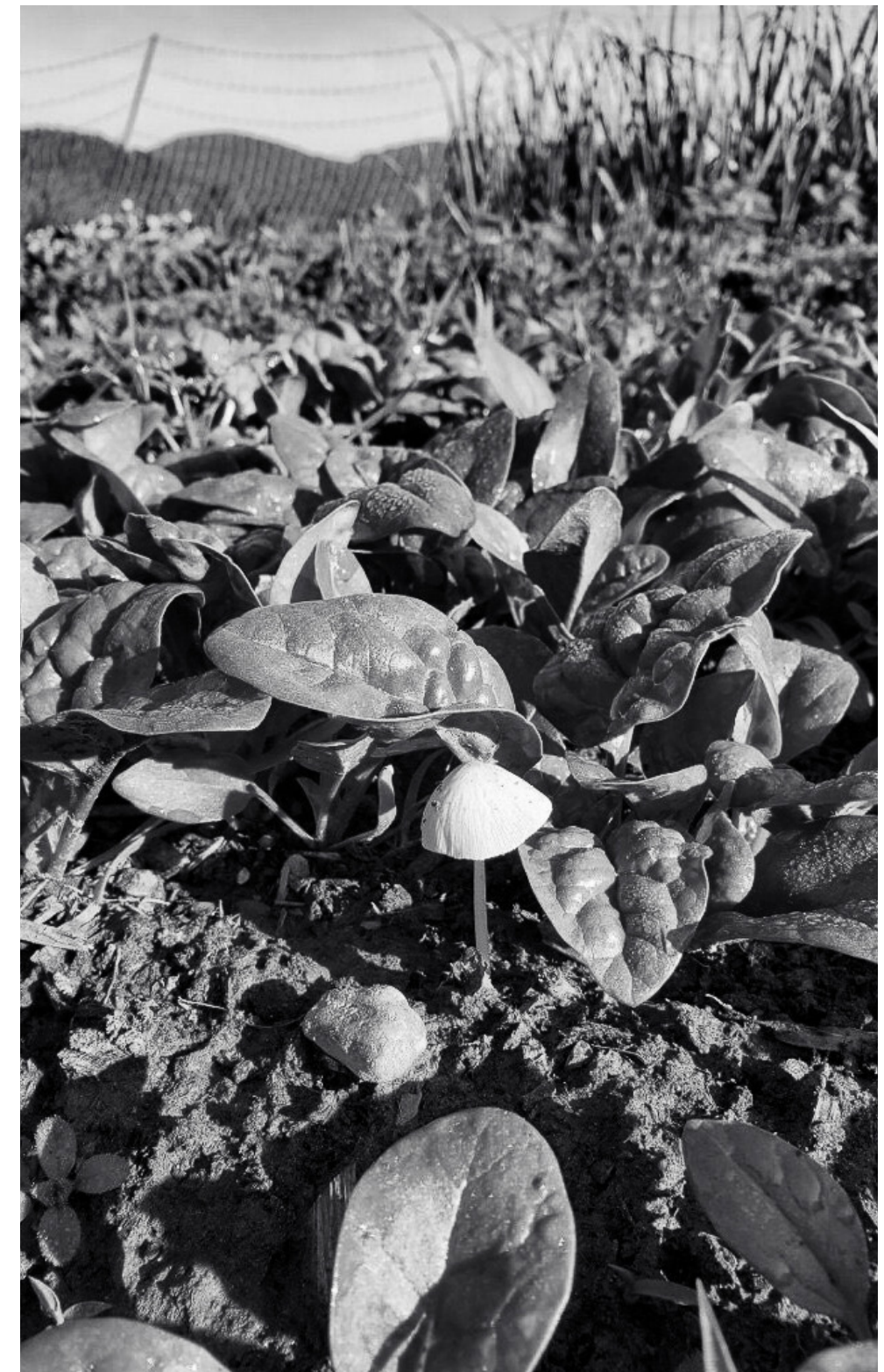
experience also brought some priorities to light, such as the importance of tending to mental health, learning to ask for help, learning to reframe failure as a learning opportunity, and learning to take the long view (hence the chestnut planting).

Three years after completing the Farm Beginnings program, the biggest support for Stoni are the people and connections made through the cohort of farmers in the program. Stoni formed relationships with other growers that continue today. These fellow beginning farmers have supported Stoni in a variety of ways to continue developing and visioning for New Tradition Farm, including showing up to help relocate the farm last year and participating in a visioning session for the newly leased land where the perennial planting went in.

"Starting a farm challenged every fiber of my being in ways I couldn't have imagined," Stoni shared during a recent farm visit. "Going through the Farm Beginnings program helped me break down the challenges into distinct and manageable topics. It also connected me to amazing peers, mentors, and technical service providers throughout the state."

It's clear that people and relationships are central to everything Stoni does on the farm. When asked about what keeps them farming, they instantly replied, "People!" Stoni loves vending at farmers markets, chatting with customers, sharing their farming practices, delivering fresh food to the food shelf, and enjoying the pleased expressions on peoples' faces when they taste delicious farm-fresh vegetables.

"At its heart, New Tradition Farm is a call to action for a better, tastier world. Don't you think we need some new traditions in our culture and our food system? I do." Stoni writes on the New Tradition Farm website. "We as a society have been destroying our Earth, destroying each other, and eating really gross, toxic, lifeless food as we do so. New Tradition Farm calls on us--as salad farmers and salad eaters--to flip the script together and instead create traditions of nurturing the Earth, nurturing our communities, and eating really delicious, life-giving food while we do it." ◇



Applications for NOFA-VT's Farm Beginnings and Journey Farmer programs open mid-August.

Please visit [NOFAVT.ORG/FARM-BEGINNINGS](https://NOFAVT.ORG/FARM-BEGINNINGS) or [NOFAVT.ORG/JOURNEY-FARMER](https://NOFAVT.ORG/JOURNEY-FARMER) to learn more and sign up to be notified when applications open.

# Big Win for Local Food Access

By Johanna Doren, NOFA-VT Direct Markets & Local Food Access Program Director

We are thrilled to share that the 2024 Vermont legislative session marks an incredible win for food access in Vermont: the State Legislature has allocated \$300k in one-time funding to support NOFA-VT's food access programs!

## The Changing Landscape of Local Food Access Programs

NOFA-VT operates several programs aimed at making local food more accessible to low-income Vermonters while ensuring that farmers are justly compensated for the cost of food. Two of NOFA-VT's flagship local food access programs are Crop Cash and Farm Share. With every dollar invested in these programs, low-income Vermonters can purchase more healthy, fresh, local food that they could not purchase otherwise, and Vermont farmers receive a reliable, fair price for their products. The benefits of these win-win programs are two-fold, actively working to strengthen both the community investment in viable farms and food security for Vermonters.

In the summer of 2023, thanks to another one-time allocation from the Vermont Legislature, we were able to pilot an expansion of Crop Cash, dubbed Crop Cash 'Plus,' which provided an extra benefit that SNAP (federal food assistance program) customers could access at farmers markets, to use on any SNAP-eligible food, rather than just the produce they can typically purchase with Crop Cash coupons.

While Crop Cash and Farm Share have played an integral role in increasing local food access for many Vermonters, rising food costs and other economic challenges have made it difficult to continue meeting the needs of the growing number of Vermonters who rely on these programs. Since 2019, demand for and investment in these programs has expanded rapidly. Before the pandemic, the Crop Cash and Farm Share Programs funneled \$144,630 in revenue to local farms. With the addition of Crop Cash Plus in 2023 and more Vermonters relying on the programs to afford local food, that number rose by a factor of nearly seven, exceeding \$614,500. In turn, this revenue came to farms at a critical time, when many needed that income to recover from the July 2023 flood and continue to combat the challenges of climate change and inflation.

As demand has grown, our funding has not been able to keep up, resulting in a need to decrease the number of Crop Cash coupons given to each shopper, pause Crop Cash for the winter, maintain a long wait list for Farm Share, and abstain from doing broad outreach about these programs. It has become clear that we need additional funds to sustain these programs consistently and reliably for program participants and farmers.

## Our Ask to the State Legislature

With this in mind, we advocated the state legislature for an allocation of \$478,500 in base funding (meaning it would repeat annually), to support the growth of the Crop Cash and Farm Share Programs, as well as continue the Crop Cash Plus program. Over the course of the session, program participants, farmers, farmers market managers, and NOFA-VT staff testified in front of legislators

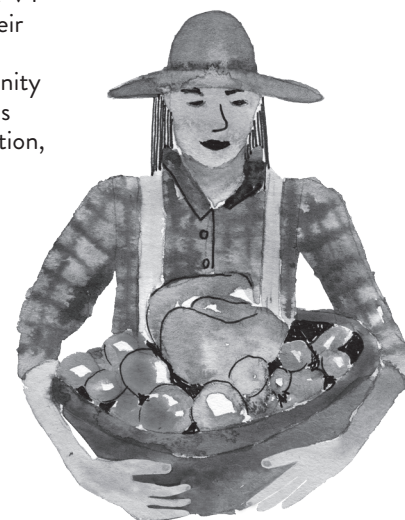
to let them know how vital these programs are and the impact state support could have. We gained strong support from champions on the House and Senate Agriculture and Appropriations committees and ultimately, amid a tight budget year, a one-time funding allocation was included in the fiscal year 2025 budget for \$300,000!

## A Turning Point for Food Security

This public investment in NOFA-VT's longstanding food access programs will have an outsized impact on Vermont communities. While this award of funding will not be enough to repeat the Crop Cash Plus pilot this year, we foresee being able to increase Crop Cash usage by at least 20% and fund nearly 100 more subsidized CSAs through our Farm Share Program in the coming year. The funding will also allow us to increase equitable access to these programs by expanding our ability to market them more widely, and, in particular, to do more intentional outreach to communities experiencing the most significant barriers to accessing local food. As part of this expanded outreach effort, we're excited to have partnered with our friends at the Vermont Language Justice Project to now offer Crop Cash instructional videos in 18 languages!

We will be returning to the state house next year to advocate for increased funding in the state budget, building upon this momentum toward meaningful food security in our state. Additionally, we will seek base funding, which would mean our local food access programs would receive State support every year, sustaining them so that they can consistently serve our community members and farmers without so many fluctuations (and, hopefully, make Crop Cash Plus permanent!). We are also heartened by this allocation of funding because it is an important step forward on a key strategy outlined in the Vermont Food Security Roadmap, a guide to ensuring all Vermonters are food-secure by 2035. Public funding for these food access programs marks strong momentum toward meaningful food security in our state.

If you'd like to take an active role in implementing the Vermont Food Security Roadmap, Hunger Free Vermont would love for NOFA-VT members to consider joining their local Hunger Council. These 10 state-wide coalitions of community members and local organizations work together to share information, raise awareness, brainstorm solutions, and build effective collaborations. No matter where you live in Vermont, there's a group of people working to end hunger and improve food security. Membership is open to anyone who wants to be a part of this work! Visit [hungerfreevt.org/join-your-local-hunger-council](http://hungerfreevt.org/join-your-local-hunger-council) to learn more! ♦



# Vermont Family Farmer of the Month

By Kevin Haggerty, NOFA-VT Climate Resilience Specialist

The Vermont Family Farmer of the Month Award continues to recognize outstanding farms across the state for their commitment to sustainable agriculture and innovative projects. Administered by NOFA-VT in collaboration with VHC Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, Shelburne Farms, and the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, this award highlights farms contributing to a resilient agricultural landscape and demonstrating environmental stewardship. We are honored to introduce these latest awards:



## Roots Too Farm, St. Johnsbury - February, 2024

Susan Monahan and Hisashi Kominami founded Roots Too Farm in 2015 when they purchased the farm in St. Johnsbury through Vermont Land Trust's Farmland Access Program. Over the past nine years, they've transformed a former dairy into a vibrant haven with 1.36 acres in production, offering certified organic vegetables, strawberries, flowers, and herbs.

Roots Too Farm was awarded \$12,000 to enhance the water and electrical systems in their high tunnels, which cover over 5,000 square feet. This project aims to address their challenge of limited water access during late winter and early spring. The upgrades, including installing frost-free hydrants, circulation and ventilation fans, and a point-of-use water treatment system, will significantly boost production, allowing for greens earlier in the season and meeting high customer demand during shoulder seasons.



## Triple J Pastures, Irasburg - March, 2024

Triple J Pastures encompasses 65 acres of verdant land in Irasburg where a diverse array of livestock thrives under Jen Rodriguez and John Belanger's stewardship. From pasture-raised chicken, turkey, lamb, pork, and beef to seasonal vegetables, Jen and John's commitment to regenerative farming practices and community engagement permeates every aspect of their operation.

Triple J Pastures was awarded \$12,000 to purchase three lightweight chicken tractors for their broiler operation. Their current tractors, cumbersome and labor-intensive, accommodate only 40 to 50 broilers each. The replacements, crafted from aluminum and equipped with wheels, will house 100 broilers each, significantly enhancing their operational efficiency and market competitiveness. This investment not only aligns with Triple J Pastures' commitment to environmental sustainability but also empowers them to meet the growing market demand for their products.



## Honey Field Farm, Norwich, VT - April, 2024

In 2019, Eli Hersh and Valerie Woodhouse started Honey Field Farm after purchasing land from the historic Killdeer Farm in Norwich. Honey Field Farm specializes in producing annual and perennial flower starts, cut flowers, houseplants, succulents, hot sauce, certified organic veggie and herb plants, and produce. Eli and Valerie's commitment to responsible stewardship encompasses holistic land management practices, rigorous organic farming techniques, and a dedication to addressing the impacts of climate change through sustainable infrastructure upgrades.

Honey Field Farm was awarded \$12,000 to transform one of their greenhouses into a primary benchtop propagation house, streamlining soil mixing, tray filling, and planting operations. This project involves repairing and upgrading essential greenhouse components, including ridge purlins, end wall doors, ventilation systems, and heating units. This new infrastructure improves workflow, reduces labor stress, and decreases fossil fuel use for heating, resulting in increased financial stability. ♦

Applications are open to any small or medium-sized farms in Vermont. The next round of applications will open in September. To learn more, visit [VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG](http://VERMONTFAMILYFARMERAWARD.ORG).

# NOFA-VT Grants \$150,000 To Build Resilience on 61 Farms Around Vermont

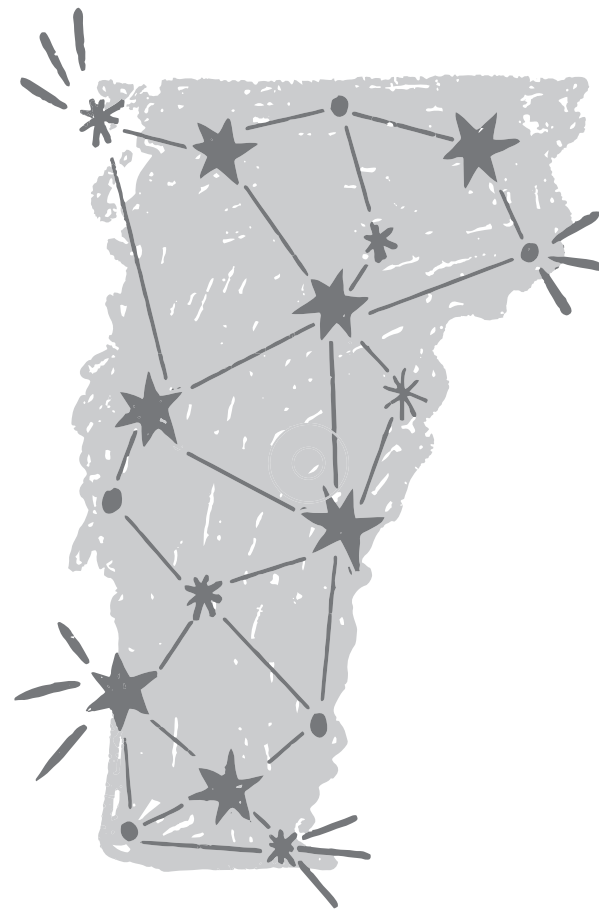
By Eric Boatti, NOFA-VT Climate Resilience Specialist

This spring, NOFA-VT awarded our fifth annual round of Resilience Grants to fund projects aimed at improving long-term resilience on farms and in communities across Vermont. We received a record 171 applications and just over \$453,000 in requests from farmers around the state, marking a 10% increase in requests from 2023. Ultimately, the review committee (a participatory panel of farmers and farmworkers) opted to award 56 grants – benefiting a total of 61 producers including multi-farm projects – totaling \$150,444. These grants provided up to \$2,500 per farm, with multi-farm applications receiving up to \$2,500 per participating farm or organization. Thirty-two (57%) of the grants were awarded to farm businesses that are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-led, LGBTQ farmer-led, and/or disabled farmer-led, with 18 (32%) of our recipient farms identifying as BIPOC.

Late frosts, excessive rainfall, and harrowing flooding resulted in significant upheaval for our agricultural community in 2023. In light of these extreme challenges, we bore witness to the inspiring resilience of Vermont's farmers. In agriculture, resilience is often referred to as the ability of a farming system to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses, while maintaining its ability to sustain productivity. These shocks and stresses include natural disasters, droughts, floods, erratic weather patterns, and increases in pests and diseases. What a farm needs to build and maintain resilience is often context-specific, and no one knows their farm better than the farmers themselves. The Resilience Grant application asks farmers to define what “resilience” means to them and to identify their most pressing needs for building resilience on their farms and in their communities. We at NOFA-VT are committed to continuously utilizing this information as we build out programs like Resilience Grants, designed to meet the evolving needs of our agricultural community.

This year, our farmer-applicants shared in their definitions of resilience many common themes: enduring hardship, adapting to volatility, seeking opportunities in moments of change, and fostering the necessity of interdependence. One definition of resilience that captured many applicants' ethos after 2023 read: “Resilience means having the tools to mitigate the effects of an increasingly chaotic climate, specifically excess rainfall. We will increase our soil health and ensure a clean water supply to provide safe, nutrient-dense food to our community.” Another farmer, speaking to the spirit and character of resilience, wrote: “Whether in reference to climate change, economic depression, or social injustice, resilience is characterized by a dogged determination to survive by any means necessary. Self-sufficiency, mutual aid, and ecological diversity are key to resilience.”

Resilience Grant applicants sought funding for a wide variety of purposes. Projects centered on acquiring or repairing equipment and building or further developing infrastructure comprised 40% of funded projects, the largest category overall. These projects will cover expenses associated with building greenhouses and hoop houses,



increasing cold storage capacity, developing farm stands, and acquiring equipment such as livestock trailers, electric fencing, and wash-pack systems. One example of this type of project came from Clearfield Farm in Granville who is involved in a Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) study on the impacts of delayed potato planting on the population of Colorado Potato Beetle. Their farm will use their Resilience Grant funds to upgrade from hand planting specialty potatoes on a water wheel transplanter to using a small 2-row mechanical planter. This upgrade in equipment will allow them to plant more accurately and reliably, thus increasing the integrity of their research into a pest that has been increasingly ravaging nightshade crops around the state.

Hurricane Flats Farm and Broadbrook Mountain Trees, a multi-farm collaborative grantee this year, plan to use their funds to support a long-term goal of addressing the shortage of local native tree and shrub stock, which are essential in conservation work, clean water initiatives, agroforestry development, pollinator support, and more. Broadbrook Mountain Trees will use their portion of the funds to support the propagation of these native tree and shrub species by purchasing seedlings, potting and irrigation equipment, growing substrate, etc., while Hurricane Flats Farm will utilize their portion of the funds to support the labor and other associated costs for integrating these seedlings into their organic vegetable system.

Projects awarded funding to support climate-smart agriculture by helping farmers adopt resilience-building practices such as this one represent 20% of the total grantee pool. Other projects in this category include those aimed at enhancing rotational grazing systems, soil-health building through cover cropping, and agroforestry projects that integrate trees and shrubs into agricultural production.

Building resilience through initiatives related to justice, access, and community impact comprised 15% of this year's funded projects. Examples include projects working to develop community garden plots, support equitable food access initiatives, and subsidize educational programming. One such grantee, Ezili's Respite Farm & Sanctuary, is utilizing grant funds to build an accessory on-farm business, allowing them to further actualize their mission of furthering the growth and resilience of rural Black and transgender people by providing a year-round source of affordable, culturally relevant, and healthy foods at a sliding scale price. Another example comes from Montpelier's Feast Farm, which grows produce to donate to the Montpelier Senior Activity Center's FEAST Senior Meals Program, the Montpelier Food Pantry, and the Montpelier-Roxbury Public Schools Backpack Program. They will use their grant funds to return to productivity on new land after the 2023 flooding forced the farm to relocate safely outside of the floodplain.

Managing fluctuating water resources is one of the most pressing and visceral challenges farmers are confronting in the face of a changing climate. Following the droughts of 2022 and the extreme precipitation and flooding of 2023, Vermont farmers are acutely aware of the need to build resilient water management systems. One of our final two categories, representing 15% of projects, encompass those that specifically address water resource concerns. For example, after flooding in 2023 caused bacterial contamination in their well, Stone's Throw Farmstead in Shrewsbury will use funds to purchase and install a UV filtering system to ensure water quality for their irrigation systems. Further north in Bristol, Lower Notch Farm will use their grant funds to rent equipment to excavate a waterway impacted by the severe flooding in 2023, ensuring that excess water from future flooding events will be diverted away from their blueberry fields.

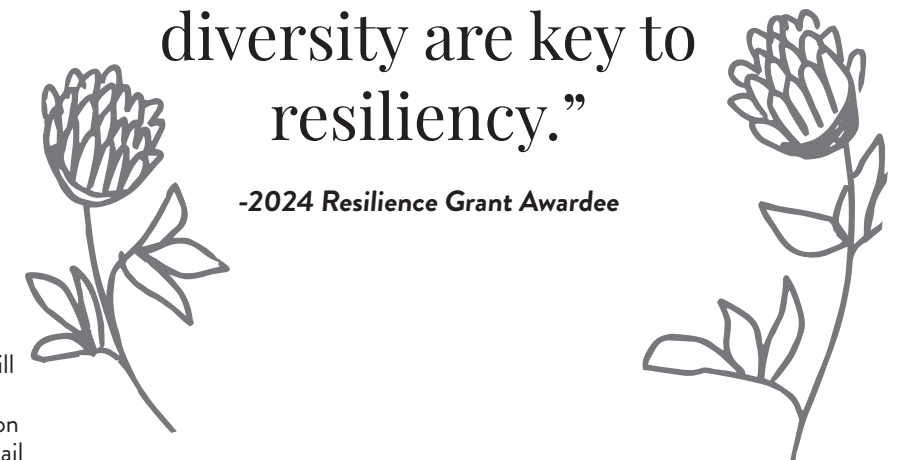
The final project category, accounting for 10% of total awards, aims to increase economic viability and revenue stream diversification through the creation of marketing materials, promotion of on-farm sales, and agrotourism development. Increased financial stability allows the farm to be better equipped to weather unexpected challenges and fluctuations inherent in agriculture. The Farm Upstream and Bone Mountain Farm, who recently collaboratively purchased a farm in Jericho to further expand their diversified organic vegetable operations, will use funds to access the equipment and labor necessary to build a farm stand. Having previously focused solely on wholesale markets, the development of a welcoming retail site will serve as a key source of revenue for their farms and a much-desired access point for local food and connection in their community.

NOFA-VT is honored to support these projects fostering long-term resilience in Vermont's farms, landscapes, and communities. This diverse range of projects exemplifies the power of resilience in agriculture, where proactive adaptation and sustainable, organic practices play a crucial role in ensuring farms' long-term viability and success. These projects showcase innovative, varied approaches to enhancing farm resilience. By investing in these initiatives, NOFA-VT is strengthening individual farms and contributing to the overall sustainability and adaptability of Vermont's agricultural landscape. ◇

*This year's Resilience Grants were funded with donations to the NOFA-VT Resilience Fund as well as generous support from Canaday Family Charitable Trust, M&T Charitable Foundation, One Hive Foundation, and WaterWheel Foundation. If you're interested in supporting the resilience of local farms, please consider donating to our Resilience Fund today.*

“Whether in reference to climate change, economic depression, or social injustice, **resiliency is characterized by a dogged determination to survive** by any means necessary. Self-sufficiency, mutual aid, and ecological diversity are key to **resiliency.**”

-2024 Resilience Grant Awardee





# An Update on the First Year of Vermont Organic Milk for Vermont's Schools

by Lauren Griswold, NOFA-VT Wholesale Markets Program Director



stick around for the next hundred years, especially ones that are certified organic, we'll need creative solutions. Our team at NOFA-VT is working on this urgent, critical issue from multiple angles: providing technical assistance to struggling farms, advocating for policy reform at the state and federal levels, securing \$6.9 million in emergency relief funding for Vermont organic dairy farms last year, ensuring organic regulatory integrity, raising consumer awareness, and developing a broader market for Vermont organic dairy.

This is a story from NOFA-VT's wholesale markets team, which is working diligently on that last point: the development of a broader market for Vermont organic dairy. The goal is to support the state's colleges and universities, health care centers, and K-12 school districts—significant dairy buyers across the state—in transitioning from

conventional dairy to Vermont organic dairy products. The NOFA-VT wholesale markets team is equally driven to expand access to healthy, fresh, local, and organic food. Unlike in homes, where access to local, organic food is often stratified by a household's income, in a public cafeteria, we all eat the same thing. This presents a powerful opportunity that we can use to ensure more Vermont children grow up eating, learning about, and valuing the healthy, delicious food grown by their neighbors.

So, in the weeks that followed that sunny April afternoon, our team of partners—NOFA-VT, Miller Farm, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU), the Northeast Organic Family Farm Partnership (NOFFP), and Farm to Institution New England (FINE)—were off to the races. Pete Miller of Miller Farm and Harley Sterling, Director of School Nutrition for WNESU, identified a price point that would work for both the farm

A little over a year ago, a Vermont organic dairy farmer and a local school nutrition director sat on a circle of milk crates at Miller Farm with NOFA-VT staff and a few farm-to-school partners. We worked through what it would take to transition three local schools from cartons of conventional milk to fresh, Vermont organic milk from a bulk dispenser. As we sipped sweet, cold Miller Farm milk in the welcome April sunshine, we also talked at length about why this project mattered—why Vermont organic milk for Vermont schools? And why now?

In recent years, a perfect storm of factors coalesced to put tremendous downward price pressure on organic dairies in the Northeast, forcing over half of Vermont's organic dairy farms to close in the past eight years alone. These factors include skyrocketing costs of production, corporate consolidation, and economies of scale that render Northeast dairies less competitive than their megafarm counterparts out west. One thing is clear: if we want the dairies that dot our hillsides to



Kids from Windham Northeast Supervisory Union elementary schools visit Miller Farm in Vernon to see where their schools' milk comes from.



The bulk organic milk dispenser is a big hit at Westminster Central School.

and the schools. The team secured funding from USDA's Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center to expand Miller Farm's milk processing facilities and ensured the milk met the National School Lunch Program's requirements.

Sterling debuted bulk Miller Farm milk in three cafeterias on the first day of school in August 2023. The reception from students, teachers, and administrators was overwhelmingly positive, and, by the end of the month, Sterling had expanded this exciting new milk service to all six schools in WNESU, transitioning the entire supervisory union to Vermont organic milk. "To say the students were excited is an understatement." Sterling wrote, upon introducing Miller Farm milk to Grafton Elementary School, "One kid shouted, 'This tastes like real milk!' And another said, 'You should bring this every day.' When I told them that's exactly what we're going to do they exclaimed, 'I LOVE THIS LUNCHROOM NOW!!'"

As word spread and schools farther afield began to express interest, Food Connects and Upper Valley Produce, who both distribute Vermont food across the state, jumped in supportively and now deliver Miller Farm milk from its origin in Vernon farther north up to Addison County and the Upper Valley. This support was welcome, as the pilot had quickly ballooned from those initial three schools to a total of twelve participating schools.

Our NOFA-VT wholesale markets team organized a celebratory on-farm field trip in the fall to foster a direct connection between the 200 WNESU elementary students, and the people and place their milk comes from. The team also facilitated the introduction of Dairy in the Classroom, a program that educates students about Vermont dairy to ensure these connections endure. The program is now offered at WNESU by Food Connects' farm-to-school staff.

Step by step, this Vermont organic school milk project grew and improved, clearing a path for others to follow. We at NOFA-VT are deeply grateful to all involved, especially Miller and Sterling, who were willing to be the trailblazers of this impactful effort. Thanks to their pioneering spirit, we now have a paradigm-shifting new option for all Vermont schools that we hope will hold promise for other institutions as well.

With lunchroom-ready Vermont organic milk now on the market, the question of cost is likely on the minds of Vermont's K-12 buyers, as Miller Farm's bulk milk sits at nearly twice the cost of conventional cartons. Sterling crunched the numbers after a year of Miller Milk in WNESU schools. He explains that the transition has proven to be cost-neutral due to the significant reduction in waste and associated cost savings, emphasizing that "the waste reduction has been profound." With bulk dispenser milk service, students have become more mindful of their consumption, resulting in minimal milk and packaging waste compared to the previous carton-based system. Sterling estimates that WNESU will save money this year on milk despite the upgrade to this local organic product.

The wholesale markets team hopes this pilot will encourage more Vermont organic dairies and schools to build upon this program's success. Farmer Pete Miller invites other Vermont organic processors to sell to local districts, noting, "We feel it is critical to raise a generation who knows where their food comes from and that they as consumers will eventually vote with their purchasing power to enact the changes they want to see in this world...This model of local, small processor to school could be replicated across the nation." Sterling underscores, "We want to help pave the way for connecting local dairies with local schools, as they represent the largest institutional buyer of milk in most towns in Vermont. Some of the best food on earth comes from Vermont and we want to see it help nourish our communities, or as we like to say, 'Vermont food for Vermont kids.'" ♦

Want to learn more? Contact NOFA-VT Wholesale Markets Program Director Lauren Griswold at [laureng@nofavt.org](mailto:laureng@nofavt.org).

Participating schools: Bellows Fall Union High School, Bellows Falls Middle School, Rockingham Central Elementary, Saxtons River Elementary, Westminster Central, Grafton Elementary, Vernon Elementary, The Prosper Valley School, Woodstock Union High School and Middle School, Woodstock Elementary, Leland and Gray Middle and High School, and Mt. Abraham Union High School.

Project partners: The USDA Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center, Miller Farm, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union, Northeast Organic Family Farm Partnership, Farm to Institution New England, New England Dairy, Food Connects, Upper Valley Produce.

## By the Numbers

This past school year, in a project that aimed to transition three Vermont schools from conventional milk to local organic milk, a whopping **12 schools** ultimately made the switch.

**2,750**

Vermont students drinking Vermont organic milk every day in school

**12**

Participating schools, across six Supervisory Unions

**250**

Gallons per week of Vermont organic milk going to Vermont schools

**8,000**

Total gallons of Vermont organic milk sold to schools this past year

**3**

Scheduled Miller Farm field trips, where students will see and experience where their milk comes from

# Vermont's Food Hubs Achieve Organic Certification Through Collaboration

By Zea Luce, NOFA-VT Organic Practices Specialist



The team at Food Connects in Brattleboro proudly celebrates their organic certification.

A large feat in Vermont's organic food system was underway throughout the first quarter of 2024. This spring, the food hubs in Vermont became certified organic! Why is this significant, what is a food hub, and why are they important to Vermont's food landscape? Read on to learn about a truly collaborative effort and why we are all celebrating this achievement. (This article is a shortened version of what is posted on our website's blog.)

Food hubs provide critical infrastructure for both producers and customers (like restaurants, stores, and universities) – by solving transportation, aggregation, storage, marketing, ordering, and fulfillment challenges that both sides otherwise face. They help small and medium-sized farmers and food entrepreneurs access larger markets by aggregating products from various producers at their facilities and offer buyers a wide array of local food through one access point. While each business model varies and some might lightly process or repackage products, they all “handle” incoming and outgoing boxes, bags, jars, and pallets of food. These regional hubs are an incredibly important part of our local food supply chain!

As a new organic regulation came online requiring food handlers to receive organic certification, NOFA-VT looked for ways to support the hubs in this transition. As such, seven Vermont food hubs are participating in an organic certification mentorship

program: ACORN Food Hub in Middlebury, Farm Connex in Hardwick, Food Connects in Brattleboro, Green Mountain Farm to School in Newport, Intervale Food Hub in Burlington, Myers Produce in Hardwick, and Vermont Farmers Food Center in Rutland. This learning cohort came together as part of the new Transition to Organic Partnership Program, which supports transitioning and organic producers with mentorship and resources. NOFA-VT is coordinating the mentorship program in Vermont and has 20 mentees paired with experienced mentors in 2024. It was a no-brainer to form a cohort with the food hubs, led by mentor, Joe Dickson.

While previously exempt, food hubs are now required to be certified organic as handlers of organic products. The National Organic Program (NOP) recently overhauled some of the organic standards, to bolster organic integrity and address potential fraud at several points in the supply chain – something for which organic advocates had been pushing for years. Third-party certification ensures that organic integrity is maintained from sourcing seeds, growing practices, harvesting, washing, packing, storage, labeling, transport, and more. Food hubs are doing their part to ensure that contamination and commingling are not happening while organic products are in their possession, which could be anything from the type of sanitizer being used, residue from

previous non-organic products, or mistaken labeling.

Joe first convened the cohort in January with a kickoff meeting where he shared that his goal was to help demystify the process and be there every step of the way. He established a schedule for regular meetings, site visits, open office hours, communication channels for quick questions, and mock inspections. Joe, who has his own consulting business, Lot 49 Advisors, has an accomplished background in the organic sector, making him well-suited to mentor in this capacity.

On the Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF) side, certification specialist Katie Birkhauser also worked directly with the food hubs. Having been a farmer herself, she loves supporting operations that keep our local food system thriving. Everyone learned a lot and it was challenging for all involved, even VOF as the certifier, as the timing between the NOP's rule publication and the deadline for food hubs to comply didn't give much lead time to adjust systems and forms to accommodate handlers (which includes food hubs). Katie ensured they were on the right track throughout the process and ultimately issued certificates to all seven hubs.

One of the last steps in the process, the inspection is the culmination of lots of detailed work and is conducted by an inspector contracted by VOF. Sarah Costin and Clotilde Hryshko were two of the inspectors assigned to several food hubs each. Both have been doing this work for years and love meeting dedicated people. Sarah said that food hubs are her new favorite operation because of what they do and Clotilde noted how positive it is to see these hubs sprinkled across the state and moving a lot of product.

The food hubs are proud of their certification and grateful for the group learning. Joe shared, “I've learned at least as much as I've shared, and been deeply inspired by the work each of these organizations is doing to build a resilient regional food system in Vermont.” ♦

## 2024 On-Farm Summer Events

We're thrilled to present another summer of community-building events! Dig into exciting topics and learn new skills at a **workshop** or enjoy a wood-fired pizza dinner and farm tour at one of our **pizza socials**.

Space is limited and pre-registration is encouraged. To learn more and register, visit: [NOFAVT.ORG/SUMMER2024](https://NOFAVT.ORG/SUMMER2024)



Wed. 7/10

Pizza Social at Miller Farm | Vernon | 5:30-7:30 pm



Sun. 7/14

Land Care for Pollinators and Other Wildlife | Birdsong Acres, Cornwall | 9:30 am-12 pm



Wed. 7/17

Pizza Social at Naga Bakehouse | Middletown Springs | 5:30-7:30 pm



Sun. 7/21

Adapting to Farming in a Flood Plain | Intervale Center, Burlington | 9 am-1 pm



Wed. 7/24

Pizza Social at Golden Russet Farm | Shoreham | 5:30-7:30 pm



Thur. 7/25

Cottage Baking With Local Grains | Brot Bakehouse and Kitchen, Fairfax | 5-7:30 pm



Mon. 7/29 & Thur. 8/1

Farm Dreams | Part 1: Union Brook Farm, Northfield, 5-8 pm | Part 2: Online, 5-7 pm



Wed. 8/7

Farmer Olympics | Flack Family Farm, Enosburg Falls | 4-8 pm



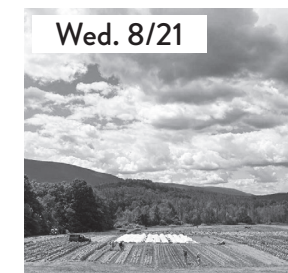
Wed. 8/14

Protected Growing With High Tunnels in a Changing Climate | Joe's Brook Farm, St. Johnsbury | 4-6:30 pm



Thur. 8/15

Pizza Social at Foote Brook Farm | Johnson | 5:30-7:30 pm



Wed. 8/21

Organic Methods for a Thriving Vegetable Farm | Earth Sky Time Community Farm, Manchester | 4-6 pm



Tues. 8/27

Pizza Social at Snug Valley Farm | East Hardwick | 5:30-7:30 pm



Fri. 9/6

New Suns Fall Festival | New Suns Community Center, North Thetford | 5:30-8:30 pm



Sun. 9/8

Working and Weaving With Willow | Cloud Water Farm, Warren | 2-5 pm



Wed. 9/11

Preparing the Ground for Successful Agroforestry Plantings | Bread & Butter Farm, Shelburne | 4-6 pm



Sun. 9/15

Small-Scale Cut Flower Production and Floral Design Basics | By Hand Farm, Newfane | 2-5 pm



Tues. 9/24

Climate Adaptation and Soil Health Practices | Evening Song Farm, Shrewsbury | 4-6 pm

To see more details and register for events, please visit [NOFAVT.ORG/SUMMER2024](https://NOFAVT.ORG/SUMMER2024)

# NOFA-VT Members: Thank you for supporting organic agriculture and a just, ecological food system!

A warm welcome to the following members who joined us or renewed their membership this summer.

## NEW MEMBERS

Alan Homans, Lynn Reynolds, & Emma Homans, Huntington, VT  
Allen Matthews, Randolph Center, VT  
Ann Doherty, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
Arianna Koch, Watertown, MA  
Bernholz Household, Bridport, VT  
Edwina Ho, Shoreham, VT  
Erin Clements, Londonderry, VT  
Farmer Household, East Fairfield, VT  
Fran Miller, South Royalton, VT  
Francis Whitney, Richford, VT  
Gail Holmes, Shelburne, VT  
Hayley Jones, Burlington, VT  
JoAnne Dennee, Charlotte, VT  
Kristina Sweet, Essex Junction, VT

## NEW & RENEWING BUSINESS MEMBERS

1000 Stone Farm, Brookfield, VT  
AC Dairy, St Albans, VT  
Adam's Berry Farm, Charlotte, VT  
Agrigorial LLC, West Farm, Jeffersonville, VT  
AJ's Happy Chick Farm, West Glover, VT  
Alston Farm, Williamstown, VT  
Amber Roots Farm, Irasburg, VT  
American Meadows, Shelburne, VT  
Arcana Gardens & Greenhouses, Jericho, VT  
Ascutney Harvest, Windsor, VT  
Ascutney Mountain Horse Farm L3C, Perkinsville, VT  
Aurora Farms, Charlotte, VT  
Back Beyond Farm LLC, Chelsea, VT  
Bailey Farm, Craftsbury, VT  
Basin Farm, Bellows Falls, VT  
Bear Roots Farm, LLC, Williamstown, VT  
Bee the Change, Weybridge, VT  
Bird in Hand Farm, Bolton, VT  
Birdsong Herb Farm, Cornwall, VT  
Blackbird Organics, Plainfield, VT  
Blue Heron Farm, Grand Isle, VT  
Bone Mountain Farm, Jericho, VT  
Boneyard Farm, Cambridge, VT  
Boudreau's Big Maples, Irasburg, VT  
Bourdon Maple Farm, Woodstock, VT  
Bread & Butter Farm, Shelburne, VT  
Breezy Valley Farm, Irasburg, VT  
Buffalo Mountain Co-op, Hardwick, VT  
Butterworks Farm, Troy, VT

Camp Merrishko, East Randolph, VT  
Carrier Farm, Washington, VT  
Cate Farm, Plainfield, VT  
Chambers Farm, North Clarendon, VT  
Champlain Valley Apiaries, Middlebury, VT  
Choiniere Family Farm, Highgate Ctr, VT  
Clear Brook Farm, Shaftsbury, VT  
Clearfield Farm, Granville, VT  
Common Roots, South Burlington, VT  
Cross Road Dairy, Newport Ctr, VT  
Devins Farm, Bradford, VT  
Dig Dig Farm, Hinesburg, VT  
Diggers' Mirth Collective Farm, Burlington, VT  
Dog River Farm, Berlin, VT  
Donegan Family Dairy, Charlotte, VT  
Doolittle Farm, Greensboro Bend, VT  
Dry Brook Farm, W Pawlet, VT  
Dubs Farms, Berkshire, VT  
Earth Arts, Catskill, NY  
Easy Doer Farm, Bethel, VT  
Echo Farm & Farmstead Catering, Essex, NY  
Elmer Farm, Middlebury, VT  
Elmore Roots Nursery, Elmore, VT  
Elysian Fields, Shoreham, VT  
Engelbert Farms, Nichols, NY  
Eponym Florals LLC, Bristol, VT  
Fairy Tale Farm, Bridport, VT  
Farm at Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, Richmond, VT  
Farm on the River, Springfield, VT  
Flack Family Farm, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Flag Hill Farm, Vershire, VT  
Flying Dog Farm, Tunbridge, VT  
Flywheel Farm, E Montpelier, VT  
Foote Brook Organic Farm, Johnson, VT  
Footprint Farm LLC, Starksboro, VT  
Foster Farm Botanicals LLC, East Calais, VT  
Four Directions Farm, Walden, VT  
Free Verse Farm, Chelsea, VT  
Friends & Neighbors Organic Farm, LLC, Marshfield, VT  
Full Moon Farm, Inc, Hinesburg, VT  
Giroux's Poultry Farm, Inc., Chazy, NY  
GMG Farms, Shelburne, VT  
Golden Russet Farm, Shoreham, VT  
Grandmother Cherry Sanctuary, Plainfield, VT

Grateful Morning Farm, Shaftsbury, VT  
Green Acres Homestead, Burlington, VT  
Green Mountain Spinnery, Putney, VT  
Harlow Farm, Westminster Stn, VT  
Hartshorn Farm Market, Waitsfield, VT  
Haven Hill Farmstead, Wallingford, VT  
Hen Peck Farm, Marshfield, VT  
High Mowing Organic Seeds, Wolcott, VT  
Highfields Farm, Randolph, VT  
Hill Section Farm, Hyde Park, VT  
Hillside Lane Hemp LLC, Randolph, VT  
Honey Field Farm, Norwich, VT  
Houde Family Farm, St Johnsbury, VT  
Howe Library, Burlington, VT  
Howmars Farm, Franklin, VT  
Howvale Farm, Tunbridge, VT  
Hoyt Hill Farmstead, Tunbridge, VT  
Hunger Moon Farm, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Hurricane Flats, South Royalton, VT  
IMIO, Essex Junction, VT  
International Botanical Ingredients, Shelburne, VT  
Intervale Community Farm, Burlington, VT  
Jericho Farmers Market, Jericho, VT  
Jericho Settlers' Farm, Inc., Jericho, VT  
Joe's Brook Farm, St Johnsbury, VT  
Khelcom Farm, Berlin, VT  
Killdeer Farm, Fairlee, VT  
Kimball Brook Farm, N Ferrisburgh, VT  
Kingsbury Market Garden, Waitsfield, VT  
Kiss the Cow Farm, S Royalton, VT  
Larson Farm LLC, Wells, VT  
Leaping Bear Farm, Putney, VT  
Leibold Farm, Groton, VT  
Lewis Creek Jerseys Inc, Danville, VT  
Lilac Ridge Farm, Brattleboro, VT  
Lilly Farms at Marshall Park, East Dover, VT  
Long Wind Farm, E Thetford, VT  
Long Winter Farm, Stowe, VT  
Longest Acres Farm, LLC, Chelsea, VT  
Longview Lambs, Bennington, VT  
Lot 49 Advisors, Peru, VT  
Love Your Mother Farm, Hinesburg, VT  
Lovers Lane Farm, Hartland, VT  
Luna Bleu Farm, S Royalton, VT  
MacBain Homestead, West Danville, VT  
Maple Wind Farm, Richmond, VT  
McKnight Farm, E Montpelier, VT

Miller Farm, Vernon, VT  
Moksha Farm, Roxbury, VT  
Molly Brook Farm LLC, West Danville, VT  
Mount Hunger Jerseys, E Burke, VT  
Mountain Meadows Farm, Jamaica Plain, MA  
Mountainyard Farm, Ripton, VT  
Naked Acre Farm, Hyde Park, VT  
New England Farmers Union, New Boston, NH  
New Leaf Organics, Bristol, VT  
New Village Farm, Shelburne, VT  
Newfield Herb Farm, Craftsbury Common, VT  
Nitty Gritty Grain Company of Vermont, Charlotte, VT  
Old Friends Farm, Amherst, MA  
Philo Ridge Farm, Charlotte, VT  
Pineville Farm, Randolph Ctr, VT  
Pleasant Mount Farm, Huntington Ctr, VT  
Pleasant Valley Farm, Argyle, NY  
Quarry Road Farms, Middlebury, VT  
Quill Hill Farm, Poultney, VT  
Ramblebramble Farm, LLC, Huntington, VT  
Red Wagon Plants, Hinesburg, VT  
Renaissance Farm, Sudbury, VT  
Renegade Equine, Brownsville, VT  
Rise Sugarworks, Lincoln, VT  
Riverside Farm, E Hardwick, VT  
Rock Bottom Dairy, Strafford, VT  
Rockledge Maple Trust, St Albans, VT  
Rolling Bale Farm LLC, Shoreham, VT  
Royal Yellowstone Maple Co, Underhill, VT

Royalton Farmers Market, South Royalton, VT  
Savage Gardens, N Hero, VT  
Schoolhouse Farm, LLC, Plainfield, VT  
Scott Farm Orchard, Dummerston, VT  
Seize the Day Farm, Tunbridge, VT  
Severy Farm LLC, Cornwall, VT  
Simplicity Farm, Brookfield, VT  
Sprano Farm, Alburgh, VT  
Squier Family Farm LLC, Tinmouth, VT  
Stony Pond Farm, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Sunday Bell Farm, Danville, VT  
Sunnybrook Farm, Middlesex, VT  
Sunrise Orchards, Cornwall, VT  
Sunrise Organic Farm, White River Jct, VT  
Sunsoil, Hardwick, VT  
Susan McGarry, Middlebury, VT  
Sustainable Woodstock, Woodstock, VT  
Sylvan Moon Farm, Putney, VT  
Taconic End Farm, Leicester, VT  
Tamarack Hollow Farm LLC, Barre, VT  
Taproot Nursery, Weybridge, VT  
Taylor Valley View Farm, Washington, VT  
The Corse Farm Dairy LLC, Whitingham, VT  
The Elmore Sugarhouse, Lake Elmore, VT  
The Farm at Saint Michael's College, Colchester, VT  
The Farm Upstream, Warren, VT  
The Killeen Crossroads Farm, Shelburne, VT  
The Maple Standard, Burlington, VT  
The Mountain School of Milton Academy, Vershire, VT

The Preserved Garden LLC, Westmoreland, VT  
The Sayre Fields LLC, Hinesberg, VT  
Three Square Farm, Springfield, VT  
Tom Capuano & Kim Heath's Farm, Proctor, VT  
Too Little Farm, Barnet, VT  
Trillium Hill Farm, Hinesburg, VT  
Triple J Pastures, Irasburg, VT  
Tunbridge Hill Farm, Tunbridge, VT  
Turtlehill Farm, LLC, Bridport, VT  
Union Brook Farm LLC, Northfield, VT  
Uphill Farm, Whitefield, NH  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colchester, VT  
Vermont Farm to Plate, Montpelier, VT  
Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association, Lyndonville, VT  
Vermont Trade Winds Farm, Shoreham, VT  
Von Trapp Farm, Waitsfield, VT  
Walker Farm, East Dummerston, VT  
Wayside Farm, Randolph Ctr, VT  
Whitetail Acres, Williamstown, VT  
Wilbur Farms LLC, Whiting, VT  
Wild Earth Farm LLC, Randolph Center, VT  
Willsboro Farm, Willsboro, NY  
Wilson Herb Farm, Greensboro, VT  
Witchcat Farm, Enosburg Falls, VT  
Wood's Market Garden, Brandon, VT  
Woodard's Farm, Waterbury Ctr, VT  
Woodstock Inn & Resort, Woodstock, VT  
Yellow Farmhouse Inn, Waitsfield, VT

## New Organic Certifications

Vermont Organic Farmers welcomes the following new producers who have recently obtained organic certification for all or a portion of their operation, joining the over 750 organic farmers and processors throughout the state.

Abenaki Springs Farm  
ACORN Food Hub  
Bill Werneke  
David Holton  
Daybreak Maple LLC  
Food Connects, Inc.  
Francis Whitney  
Grass Cattle Company LLC  
Green Mountain Farm-to-School  
International Botanical Ingredients

Intervale Center, Inc.  
Jenna's Promise Roasting  
Mink Meadow Farm, LLC  
Moonchild Farm  
Reuben Stoltzfus  
Samuel Stoltzfus  
Sebastien Latraverse  
Ted Lancaster  
Vermont Farmers Food Center

Learn more about the benefits of certified organic, locally grown at [VERMONTORGANIC.ORG/WHY-ORGANIC](https://VERMONTORGANIC.ORG/WHY-ORGANIC)







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To find a market near you, go to: [NOFAVT.ORG/FARMERSMARKETS](https://NOFAVT.ORG/FARMERSMARKETS)